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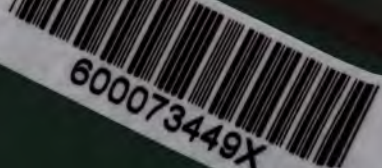
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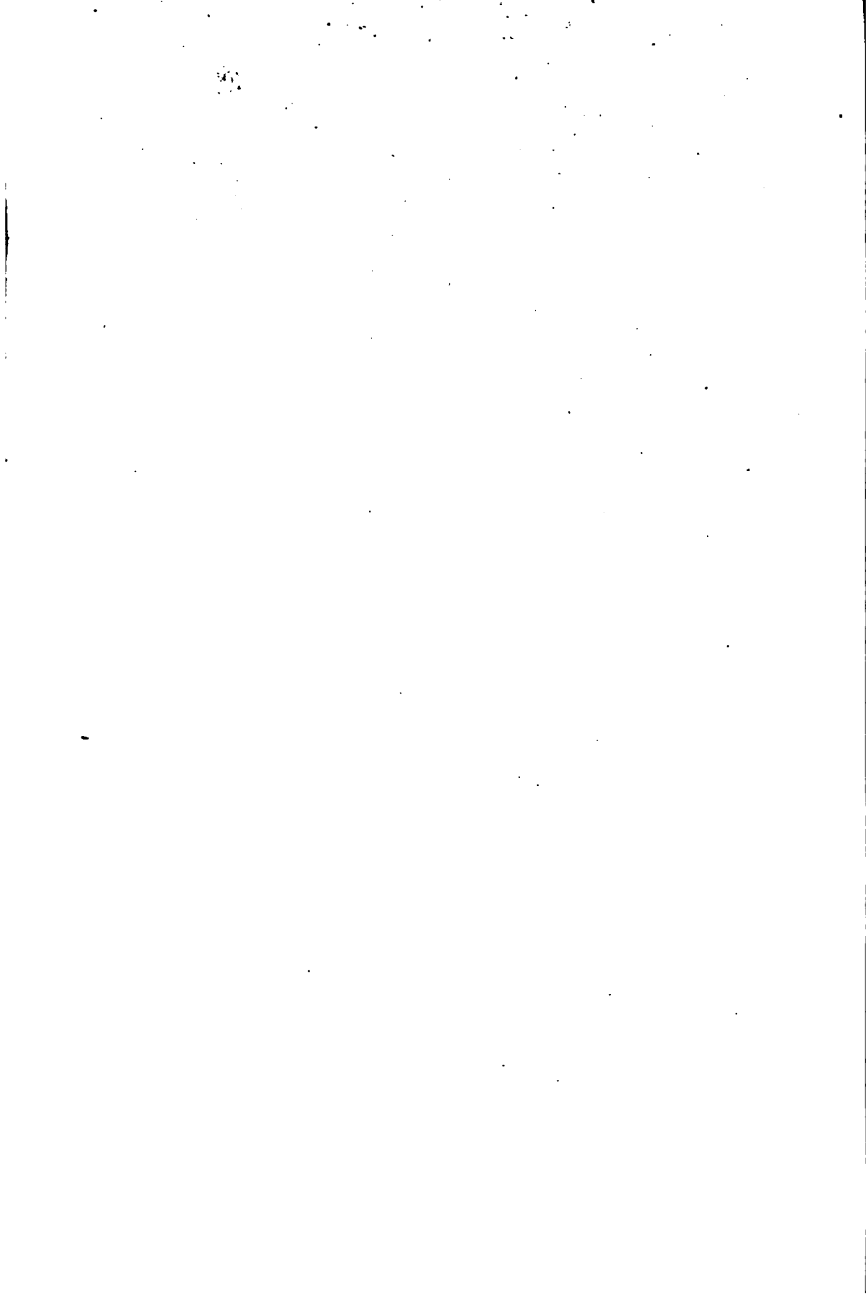


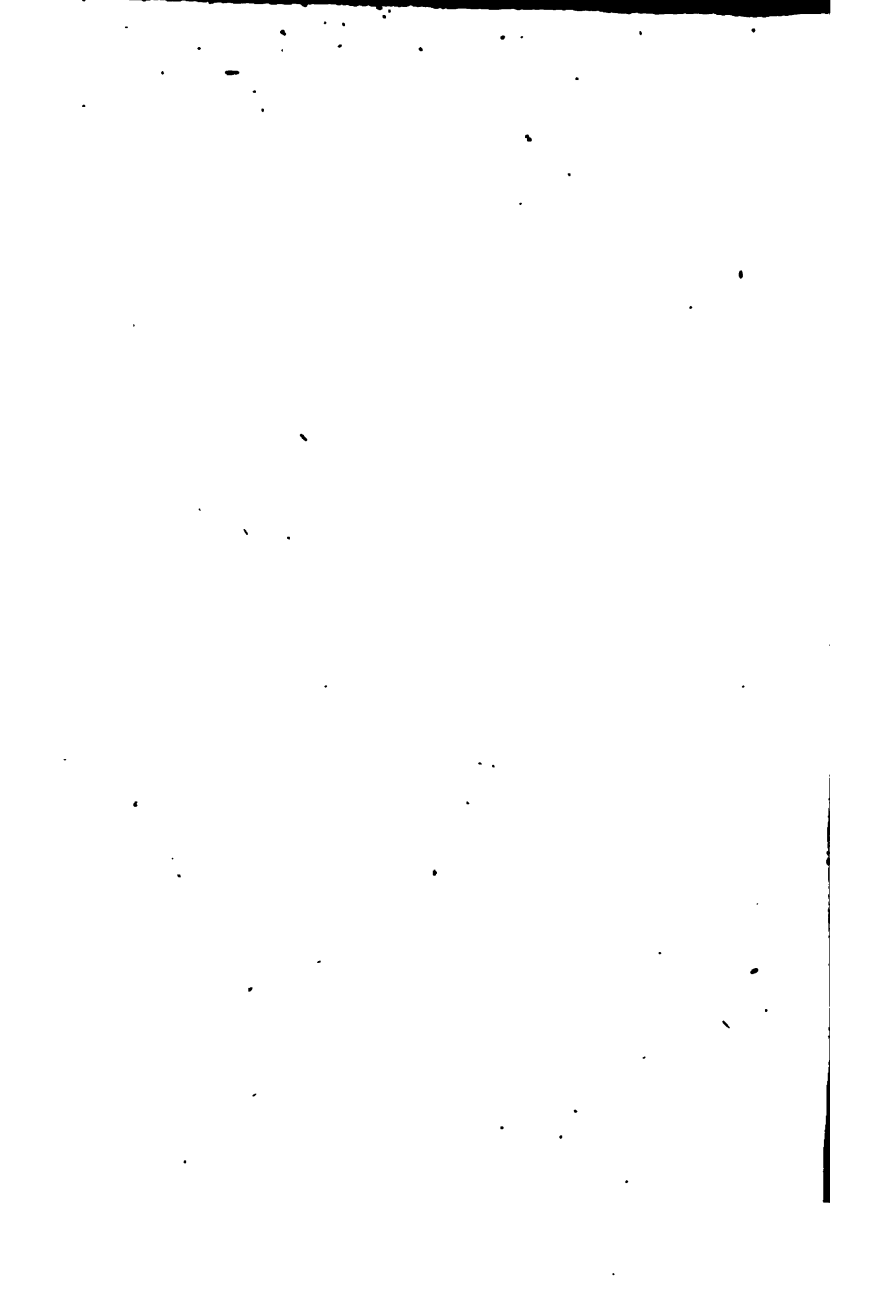


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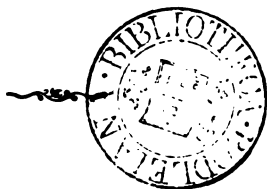


'Is it a miracle—a trick? Are you brothers, then? But speak, wretches, which of you is the Pacha, my enemy?'—STORIES FROM OVER THE SEA, page 16.



STORIES FROM OVER THE SEA.

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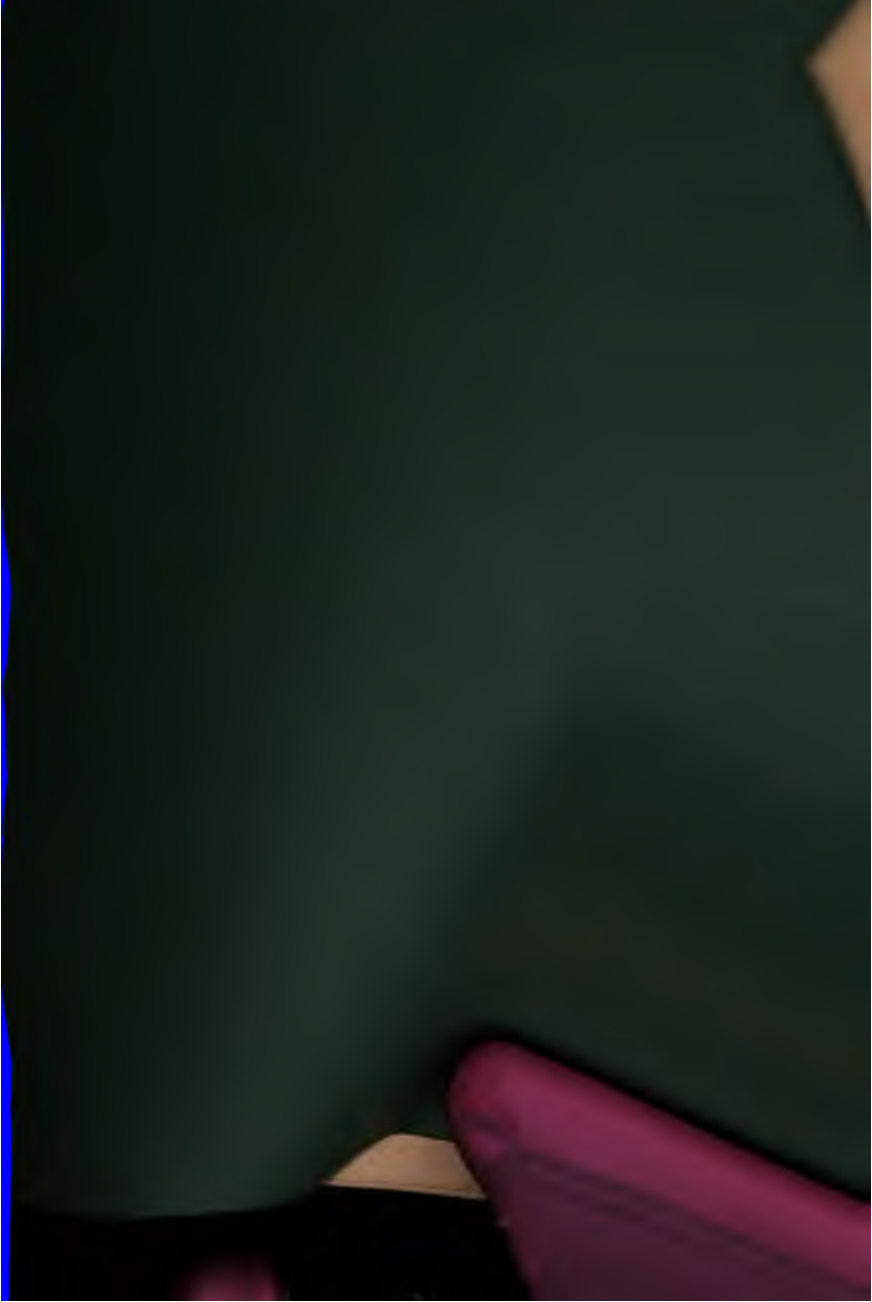
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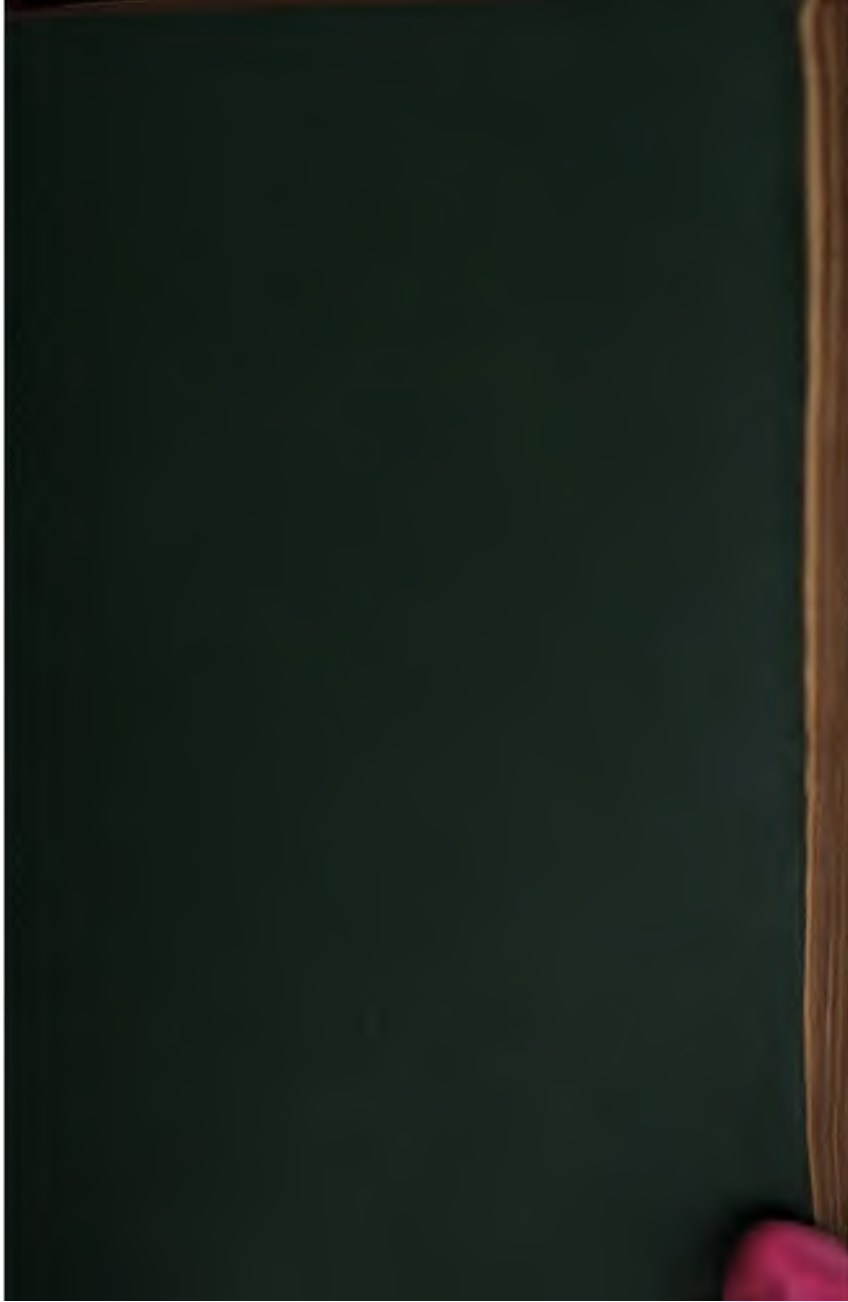




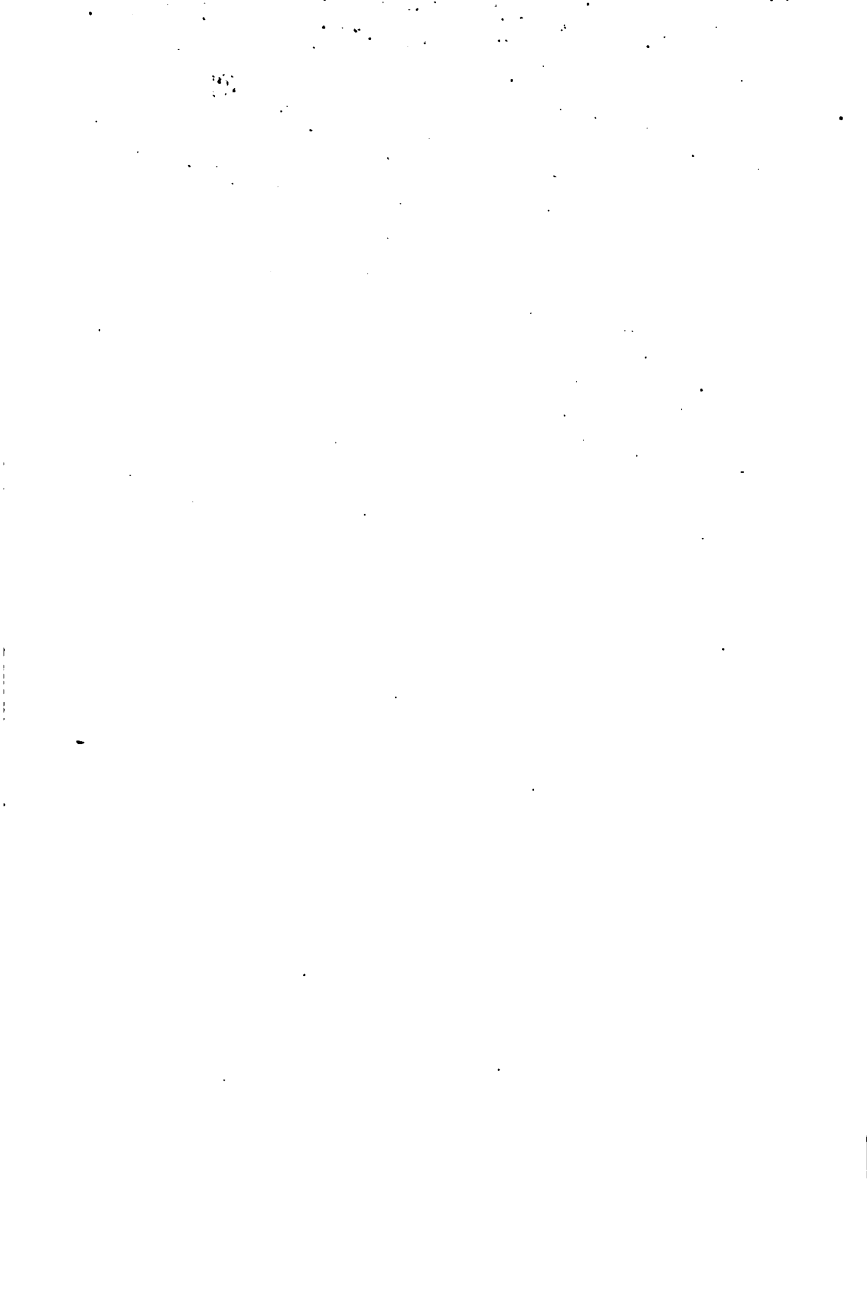




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themselves upon him so suddenly that he had not time to stand on his defence. Thinking that they were robbers who wished his horse and his money rather than his life, he cried out to them that he would give up all that he possessed, but they, without saying a word, descended from their saddles, and after having tied his feet underneath the belly of his horse, hurried him rapidly away, paying not the least attention to his earnest entreaties.

Mustapha and his silent companions left the high road, to bury themselves in a thick forest, through which they rode for about an hour, till they came to a picturesque spot, overshadowed by large trees and surrounded by a circle of rocks, which seemed designed for a natural fortification. About fifteen or twenty tents were pitched in this clearing, and here and there were feeding magnificent horses and camels.

After having unbound Mustapha, his conductors made a sign to him to get off his horse, and led him into a tent, which was larger than the rest, and the inside of which was decorated with great magnificence. In one corner, squatted upon a pile of rich

cushions, he saw an old man of small stature and repulsive appearance. His features were ugly, his skin black and glistening; an expression of sullen malice could be read in his greenish eyes as well as in his contracted mouth, and gave his whole countenance a look that at once inspired hatred and distrust. But in spite of the airs of importance which this man tried to give himself, Mustapha thought that it could not be for such a contemptible monster that the tent was so sumptuously adorned, and the first question of his conductors showed him that he was right.

"Where is the Master?" they asked of the dwarf.

"He is hunting; but he has charged me to fill his place in his absence."

"You! It is no business of yours," replied one of the thieves scornfully. "The question is whether this dog ought to perish or pay a ransom, and the Master only can decide that. You, indeed!"

The little wretch drew himself up with an attempt at dignity, and reached as high as he could to seize the ear of his despiser. His efforts were useless; but he made up for his ill-success by a torrent of abuse

which the others returned in kind, with such vigour that the whole tent was filled with the sound of angry voices. Suddenly the curtain was raised, and gave entrance to a man of high stature and fierce look. He was young and handsome as a prince ; his clothes and his arms, with the exception of a dagger studded with rubies, were plain and unadorned, but his stern eye and the natural dignity of his bearing, commanded respect much more effectually than the most brilliant signs of rank would have done.

“Who dares to brawl in my tent ?” he cried in a terrible voice.

For a minute, fear tied every tongue. At length one of the men who had captured Mustapha related what had happened. Then the face of the Master, as they called him, grew purple with anger, and addressing himself to the dwarf, he demanded—

“What has given you the boldness to put yourself in my place, Hassan ?”

He, trembling with fear, had rolled himself up in a corner, and was making himself as small as he could.

“Begone, fool !” cried the Master to him, with a

threatening gesture. And without replying, the dwarf rushed out of the tent as fast as his little legs could carry him.

Mustapha was then led before the real chief, whose eyes were fixed upon him with a sort of savage fury.

"Pacha of Zuleika," he said, "your own conscience must tell you why you are brought before Mebrouk."

At this name Mustapha trembled, for he recognised it as that of the most renowned robber chief of the desert, about whom so many tales of courage and cruelty were narrated,—a man who never spared or feared an enemy. He bent low before the great chief, and replied :

"Oh, my lord, you appear to be in error about me ; I am a poor traveller, and not the pacha whom you believe me to be."

All those who were in the tent made a gesture of astonishment, but the chief went on to say :

"Your pretence will be of no use to you ; I am able to put you in presence of witnesses who know you

well, and whose testimony you cannot contradict. Let Zuleima be brought," he called out to a slave.

An old woman was introduced into the tent. She was a slave born in the pachalik of Zuleika, and who, by the cruelties she had experienced from its young ruler, had been driven to take refuge with the band of Mebrouk.

"Who is this man?" asked Mebrouk, pointing out Mustapha with his finger.

The old woman had scarcely set eyes on the prisoner, than she screamed out with an instinctive shudder—

"It is he! It is he! The monster who caused me to be beaten and tortured—it is the pacha of Zuleika! Avenge me, Mebrouk, and not only me but all the brave men and beautiful women who have died by his orders."

"Miserable wretch!" cried the chief, turning to the astonished Mustapha. "You see how little your cowardly lie will avail you! This slave who lived long years in your service, recognises you in a moment. I despise you too much to stain my hand with your

ignoble blood ; but to-morrow morning, I will have you tied to the tail of my horse, and drag you through forests and rocks from the rising of the sun till its setting."

Mustapha felt his courage failing him.

"It is the curse of my father which pursues me," he exclaimed with tears. "And thou also, thou art lost. my sweet sister ! and thou, too, dear Zoraide !"

"Your crying is useless," said one of the robbers, tying his hands securely behind his back. "It will be as well for you not to remain here much longer, for the Master is biting his lips and fingering his poignard. In such a mood he is dangerous. Trouble him no more by your presence if you wish to be one night longer in life. Come, follow us."

Disregarding their advice, Mustapha would have made another appeal to the mercy of the chief, but the robbers forced him away, and while they were dragging him from the tent, three of their comrades entered with another prisoner. Although the critical situation in which he was placed might have been supposed to occupy all Mustapha's thoughts, he could

not help noticing the extraordinary resemblance which existed between this man and himself. The only difference was that the new comer was a little darker in complexion and had rather more beard.

"We bring you the pacha whom you ordered us to seize," said the robbers, pushing their prisoner before Mebrouk.

"What does this mean?" cried the chief, looking from Mustapha to the other captive, and from him to Mustapha.

"Is it a miracle—a trick? are you brothers, then? But speak, wretches, which of you is the pacha, my enemy?"

"If you seek the pacha of Zuleika," replied the new comer, proudly, "I am he!"

The chief looked at him with his fiercest face, and by the way in which his lips worked and his eyes shone, might be judged the agitation with which he at length saw his enemy in his presence. He succeeded, however, in restraining the outward display of his passion, and without saying a word, made a sign to remove the pacha. Then, approaching Mustapha

with his own hand he cut his bonds and invited the amazed young man to sit beside him.

"By the Prophet," cried Mebrouk, when they were alone, "it is a strange chance, I must confess, which threw you into the hands of my men just at the moment when I was seeking for the pacha of Zuleika, who is as like you as one date is to another. It might have turned out badly for you ; but was it possible to believe that such a resemblance could exist ?"

And, continuing to look curiously at the features of his new guest, Mebrouk went on excusing himself for the unintentional injury done to Mustapha, who in reply only requested to be allowed at once to resume his journey, since each minute's delay might be the cause of such sad results.

Mebrouk then inquired the reasons which demanded so great haste ; and when Mustapha had briefly explained the cause of his journey, the chieftain applauded his zeal, but nevertheless pressed him to remain where he was for the night.

"You and your horse," he said, "must both be tired after a forced march of four days, and you require at

least one night's rest to enable you to continue your journey. Besides, if you wait till to-morrow morning, I will accompany you part of the way, and will show you a road which ought to bring you to Balsora in less than two days."

Mustapha began now to feel grateful to this chief, before whom, an hour before, he had trembled in hopeless fear. He accepted the invitation, and, after partaking of food, slept peaceably all night in one of the robber's tents.

He was awakened by the confused sounds of a dispute, such as he had heard on the preceding evening. He listened, and recognised above all the squeaking voice of Hassan, the malicious dwarf, of whom we have already heard. This wretch was trying to persuade his comrades that, for the sake of their own safety, they ought to make away with Mustapha, who would not fail, said he, to betray them, and reveal their retreat, if they were foolish enough to let him leave it. He proposed to lose no time in strangling Mustapha, who, as may be supposed, leapt to his feet and drew his sword, when he heard this

discussion on a subject so interesting to himself. But a more powerful protection appeared.

"If any one of you touch a hair of his head, I will kill the scoundrel like a dog," cried a terrible voice.

These words produced an instant silence, and the chieftain, followed by a slave leading two horses, presented himself at the door of the tent where his guest had passed the night, and saluted him thus :

"Peace be with you, and may the Prophet guide you in your enterprise. Let us go."

Mustapha was ready in a moment. Refreshed in body and spirit by his night's rest, he issued from the tent full of hope and vigour, and leapt upon his horse, which pranced and reared under him as if also impatient to set forth.

After leaving the tents behind, the two horsemen entered a narrow path, in which they could scarcely ride abreast, and on the way Mebrouk told his companion that the pacha, whose resemblance to the latter had nearly cost him so dear, had before been taken prisoner by the band in one of their expeditions. He had then promised, by way of ransom, to tolerate

the robbers in his government, but breaking his word, had seized one of them a few days afterwards, and had him hung without mercy.

"He has violated his promise; he shall die," said Mustapha, at the end of his story; and in a scornful tone he added: "Traitor's flesh! crow's food!"

Arrived at the outskirts of the forest, the robber reined in his horse, and showed Mustapha the road he should follow; then holding out his hand in sign of parting, said to him:

"Mustapha, our acquaintance has been made in a singular fashion; but, be that as it may, you have at all events become my guest, and there is a bond between us which only death can break. Take this dagger, my friend, and if ever you find yourself in a situation where you may be in need of a strong arm and a devoted heart, send it to me as a token, and I will fly to your aid. Take also this purse; it will perhaps be of use to you in the task which you are about to attempt."

"Thanks, generous Mebrouk," replied the young man. "I accept your dagger, for it may not be long

before I stand in need of your help; but my purse is already full enough, and I require no more money."

Without another word, Mebrouk pressed his hand, and letting the purse fall on the ground, disappeared into the forest with the rapidity of a whirlwind.

Mustapha was obliged, then, to accept the present which his host had made it impossible for him to refuse; and the munificence of the robber astonished him, for the purse was very weighty, and contained a great sum of gold. After having bowed himself in thanks to Heaven for his deliverance, Mustapha implored also its pity for the celebrated chieftain who had thus shown himself as generous a friend as he was an implacable foe. Then remounting his horse he galloped off rapidly in the direction of Balsora.

On the morning of the seventh day after leaving home, Mustapha arrived at the gates of Balsora. The first thing he did was to enquire if the market held there every year for the sale of slaves was still open.

"You have come a day too late, seigneur," was the answer, "and you may well regret it, for it was a splendid sale. On the very last day there arrived two

female slaves of such beauty that their appearance caused a sort of riot among the purchasers. People actually disputed and fought to get a glimpse of them, and they were sold at an enormous price."

Mustapha sought to hear more about these wonderful beauties who were mentioned with such admiration, and after the description given him he had little doubt that these were no others than the unfortunate girls of whom he was in search. He learned also that the man who had bought them lived forty miles from Balsora, that he was called Thuli-Kos, and that he was a very strange old man, as rich as he was old, and rather more mad than he was rich. He had been once a chief pacha under the Sultan, but had long retired into a kind of life which in every sense of the word might be called private. He kept himself shut up in a strong fortress, tormented by an unextinguishable thirst for pleasure, but held in check at the same time by a horrible fear of death, which caused him to be always fancying himself ill, and consulting at random every quack whom he fell in with.

Without the slightest delay, Mustapha wished to

mount his horse and fly in pursuit of Thuli-Kos, who could scarcely be more than one day's journey in advance of him; but a moment's reflection told him that one solitary and unknown individual like himself would have great difficulty in even approaching the powerful lord surrounded by his train, and that it would certainly be impossible for him to rescue the captives by force. Then another idea was suggested by his imagination, naturally inventive, and now stimulated by the urgency of the circumstances.

He bethought himself of that resemblance to the unfortunate pacha which had lately led him into so great danger. Having already his features, why should he not take the name also of this pacha, and thus present himself in the house of Thuli-Kos, and try by the aid of stratagem to effect the deliverance of the two girls?

Thanks to Mebrouk's money, he was soon able to hire an appropriate equipage of men and horses, and having dressed himself as well as his suite in magnificent garments, he took the road for the castle of Thuli-Kos, before which he arrived at the end of five days.

As he had himself been once a government functionary, and in this capacity had learned to be always in fear of the bowstring, old Thuli had still a great respect for every person bearing an official title. So he received Mustapha with cordiality, and even with deference. He ordered his cooks to do their best to entertain him, and, after showing him all over the castle, and boasting of its beauties and advantages, graciously invited his guest to remain as long as he pleased. Whereupon Mustapha went to bed in high hope, and dreamed that he was already carrying away his sister and his betrothed from the castle of Thuli-Kos, after setting it on fire, killing its master, and cutting his way through the ranks of his slaves.

His dream was not altogether the product of fancy. The castle was not, indeed, in a blaze, but through the curtains of his bed a light was shining upon Mustapha's face, about an hour after he had fallen asleep. He started up, rubbed his eyes, and thought he must be dreaming still. Three paces from him, with a lamp in his shrivelled hand, his wide mouth stretched still wider by a cunning laugh, stood the

hideous figure of the dwarfish wretch whom he had met in Mebrouk's tent.

"I have the nightmare," thought Mustapha, and he pinched his arms and pulled his nose to awaken himself, but the apparition did not disappear.

"What do you want? What are you doing here?" cried Mustapha, in a surprised voice.

"Lower, lower, dear seigneur," whispered the dwarf. "Lower for your own sake. I don't suppose you wish any one to know the true reason of your coming here. This reason I have guessed, or found out, whichever you please, and I come to offer you my little assistance, if you will agree to receive it."

Stupor tied Mustapha's tongue, but the dwarf went on—

"Indeed, if I had not with my own hands helped to hang the real pacha, I believe your resemblance to him would have deceived me. But time presses; let us speak seriously."

"First of all, tell me how you came to be here," replied Mustapha, full of rage at seeing himself discovered.

“Here is the thing in two words,” said the little man. “For a long time I have not been pleased with the haughty manners that our master showed to me, and the scene of which you were the cause made me utterly disgusted with the profession of robbing—in a subordinate capacity. To become an honest man all at once, however, was not easy. To manage the transition, I resolved to make myself a spy and a jailor. I have not succeeded badly to begin with, as you see, since I have been able to discover the object of your journey, and to present myself before seigneur Thuli, who has employed me as an overseer of his slaves. It is a capital place ; but I look higher still, and here is the little plan which I have arranged for your benefit and mine. We set fire to the castle—in the confusion we escape with the two captives. To reward me for my services in this matter, you give me your sister as my wife. Will that suit you? Agreed! If not, I go at once to Thuli and tell him all that I know about the pretended pacha of Zuleika. There, decide at once.”

“Wretch!” cried Mustapha, whose anger, increasing

during the impudent speech of the dwarf, reached its height when he came to an end. Leaping from his couch, the young man resolved to rid himself of this contemptible being, but the dwarf made a step backwards, let fall his lamp, which was immediately extinguished, and fled in the darkness, screaming at the pitch of his voice—

“Help! help! thieves! murder!”

The situation of Mustapha was critical. It was necessary for him to take a prompt decision, and it did not need much reflection to show him that if he wished to save the poor prisoners he must begin by saving himself.

After the alarm which had been given, it was useless to think of escaping by the door, so he rushed to the window. About twenty-five feet separated him from the ground. Steps approached, lights flitted about here and there; some minutes later and all retreat would be cut off. He could not hesitate; he hurried on his clothes, took his dagger between his teeth, and leapt out into the darkness. Luckily his fall was broken by some freshly dug earth, and he picked

himself up safe and sound and continued his flight. There was still to be climbed a high wall which surrounded the garden. In this he also succeeded luckily, by the help of some fissures in the stones, and soon he found himself in the open country.

Without losing time, he made for a little wood, in which he buried himself, and at length fell exhausted on the turf, fatigued in body at least, though not exhausted in spirit. The more difficult his task seemed to grow, the more bold became his spirit, and his successive defeats only made him more eager to accomplish his enterprise. He felt within him something which said that in the end he should triumph.

But how? By what means? It was this he had to think about. His horses and his servants were lost for him, but he saw with satisfaction that there still remained in his purse a good part of his money. Nothing was to be despaired.

It struck him that he might put to profit the information which he had formerly gained about the character of Thuli-Kos, and the especial weakness which made him the easy dupe of all vendors of

quack medicines. Mustapha thought over it, and from his fertile brain he had soon concocted a new plan of deliverance.

He made haste to leave the neighbourhood, travelling only by night, for fear of Thuli's retainers. At the first town he reached he inquired for a skilful physician, and, for several pieces of gold, persuaded him to compose a very powerful narcotic draught, the effect of which would instantly cease on the administration of another drug. Once in possession of this precious draught, he bought a false beard of great length, a black cloak, a large fur cap, a complete assortment of phials, boxes, and little pots ; in fact, all the stock-in-trade of a travelling doctor ; and, with his medical apparatus loaded on an ass, returned to the castle of Thuli. This time he flattered himself that no one would recognise him, for his false hair, and the colour with which he had painted his face, so disfigured him, that he had, some difficulty in recognising himself.

When he reached the castle, he had himself announced as the famous Arabian doctor, Chakaman-

kabudibaba, descendant of Averroes the Great, and native of Grenada, from which he had just come straight, after travelling through Europe, Asia, Africa, and other places, to offer the fruits of his long experience to the powerful, magnificent, incomparable seigneur Thuli-Kos.

What Mustapha had expected, did not fail to happen. His odd name, and his high-flown compliment, recommended him so well to the foolish old man, that he was at once welcomed to the castle, and invited to the table of its master. At the end of an hour's conversation, they were the best friends in the world, and Mustapha, by the use of a few long, scientific-sounding words, which Thuli admired all the more that he was not able to understand them, succeeded in gaining the old man's confidence to such an extent, that he considered the new-comer the greatest doctor in the world, and said he would never consult any other. Mustapha had promised him a hundred years of life, and a few more into the bargain, if he would only follow his prescriptions.

"But, first of all, Chadakibadaba," said Thuli, who

could not retain in his mind the doctor's name, and was always mutilating it in different ways, "you must come with me into my harem, and just tell me how my wives are. There are two of them especially whose health makes me very uneasy. Come!"

Mustapha could scarcely contain his joy at thinking that he was perhaps about to see his dear sister again; and as he followed Thuli, his agitation was so great that he almost thought the beatings of his heart would be heard.

They entered a chamber elegantly furnished, but with no signs of its being inhabited. Thuli approached the wall, placed his finger on a gilt knob, and pressed a spring. Instantly one of the panels flew back, and there was revealed an opening in the wall about two hand-breadths wide.

"There!" he said, "my dear Kamadakan, each of my wives will pass her arm through this aperture; you shall feel their pulses at your ease, and then you will be able to say if there is any one of them whose health is not satisfactory."

This was not at all what Mustapha had been look-

ing forward to, and it was well for him that his false beard concealed the disappointment which his countenance betrayed. But there was no help for it ; he must make the best of this opportunity, and do all he could to discover and communicate with his sister, even under such disadvantageous circumstances.

Thuli-Kos drew from his girdle a long roll of paper, and began in a loud voice to summon each of his wives. At every name, a hand came out from the wall, and the pretended doctor felt its pulse. Thirteen had gone through this examination, and had been pronounced to give signs of good health, when Thuli called "Fatma !"

A little white hand was timidly held out. Mustapha seized it, and, commanding his emotion as well as he could, declared, with a solemn air, that he found symptoms of a dangerous disease.

Thuli appeared vexed at this news, and ordered his doctor to prepare a suitable remedy, whereupon Mustapha ventured to suggest that it would be well for him to see and converse with the patient ; but such a suspicious frown spread over his employer's

face at the very mention of this, that Mustapha hastened to withdraw the proposal, and, promising to do his best, went to the chamber where his drugs were, and set to work preparing a potion. This done, he tore a leaf from his tablets, and wrote hurriedly the following lines :

“My dear Fatma, I can rescue you, if you will consent to take this draught, which will send you to sleep, and make you like one dead for several hours. But do not be afraid. I possess the means of instantly awakening you from this sleep. Will you venture ? Only have me told that the pretended remedy has not done you any good, and I will take this for a sign that you agree to my proposal.”

Mustapha soon returned to the apartment where Thuli was waiting for him, and, under pretence of again feeling the sick lady's pulse, he managed to slip the note under her bracelet, and also passed into the opening in the wall a phial containing the potion which was to have such great results.

Thuli appeared to be very much concerned about Fatma, and put off the inspection of the rest of the

harem to another occasion. When they had gone out of the room, he turned to Mustapha, and said to him :

“Kachimankababa, speak to me frankly. What do you think of Fatma’s illness ?”

“Ah, seigneur,” said the pretended doctor, with a deep sigh, “may the Prophet send you consolation ! The poor girl is attacked by a disease to which she will probably succumb.”

“What do you say ?” cried Thuli, in a rage. “What do you say, dog of a quack ? She, for whom I have paid two thousand sequins ! Fatma, who was so well yesterday—can she be dying ? Is this your boasted science, wretch ? If you do not save her, I shall have you impaled alive—understand that.”

His tone showed Mustapha that he had made a great mistake, and was running the risk of being driven out of the castle. So he summoned all his eloquence, and endeavoured to raise some hopes in Thuli’s mind. While they were talking, a black slave, attached to the service of the harem, came to

tell the doctor that his potion had given Fatma no relief.

"Oh, Fatma, Fatma!" cried Thuli, in real affliction. "Hear me, Chakamadababelda, or whatever you call yourself. Use every resource of your art! Bring out all your drugs! Save her! save her! I will pay richly for all. Or, if you fail, you know what I have promised."

"I am going to give her a composing draught," replied Mustapha, his heart beating, this time with joy, for he believed that the deliverance of his sister was now at hand.

He explained to Thuli that he must go to the shore to gather certain medicinal herbs, and, promising to return soon, left the castle. The sea was not far off. As soon as he found himself on the shore, Mustapha sought out a retired creek, and there hurriedly divested himself of his borrowed robe, his turban, his false beard, all which he threw into the sea. He saw them carried off by the waves, and then hid himself among some shrubs, and waited for the coming of night, to slip into the gloomy caverns

beneath the castle, which, as he knew, were used for tombs. There he expected that the unconscious form of his sister would be brought.

About an hour after Mustapha had left the castle a great noise of confusion and lamentation came to inform its master that his favourite, Fatma, was dying. In consternation, he sent out in all directions to seek for the doctor ; but his messengers came back, bringing nothing with them but a report that the unfortunate Chakamankabudibaba had probably fallen into the water while gathering herbs. They thought they could see his body floating at some distance in the waves, so it was settled that the doctor had been drowned.

When Thuli saw that there was no hope, he gave way to the most frightful invectives against his slaves, against the doctor who had disappeared, against everybody, in fact, and not least against himself.

"Fatma ! Fatma !" he cried. "She was so young—so expensive—so beautiful ! Two thousand sequins—and her eyes were so sweet ! Two thousand sequins—yes, all that !—not a farthing less would the greedy

Jew take. And her teeth—what pearls! Such a large price! What a treasure! I never paid so much before! I shall never see her like again! Ah! ah!”

And so the old fellow went on, crying with one eye for Fatma's youth and beauty, and with the other for the money he had thrown away upon her.

In spite of all his lamentations, however, Fatma had quietly fallen asleep in the arms of her companions; her eyes were closed; her heart had ceased to beat; the red had faded from her lips; all believed her dead.

According to the orders of Thuli, who could not bear the sight of death, and was always in haste to remove from his house anything which might remind him of his own end, the corpse was at once prepared for burial, and that same evening was lowered into the sepulchral vaults, where Mustapha had already taken up his position, concealing himself among the tombs.

As soon as the slaves who bore the bier had retired, he glided out of his retreat, lit a lamp with which he had provided himself, and drew from his girdle a little phial containing the antidote that was to recall his beloved Fatma to life.

His hand shook as he removed the covering from her face. But with what horror was he not seized when the light of the lamp showed him features which were quite unknown to him. It was neither his sister nor Zoraide, but another young girl, who was lying on the bier.

Mustapha remained for some time as if stupefied by this new stroke of fortune. With haggard looks he stared at the unfortunate form which was lying senseless before him, and for a moment he felt a mad desire to throw himself on it and strangle it with his own hands.

"But perhaps it is in no way her fault," he thought, "and at all events, she may be able to give me useful information."

He opened his phial, and applied it to the lips of the young girl. She breathed, opened her eyes, but did not come to herself all at once. At length she raised her hand, and passed it over her brow, and memory appeared to return to her along with life, for rising in her bier, she fell at the feet of Mustapha, calling him her deliverer, and covering his hands with

tears of gratitude. But Mustapha interrupted her torrent of thanks by asking how it happened that it was she, and not his sister Fatma, whom he saw before him.

The young girl looked at him in amazement, and as if not at first understanding the question which he addressed to her ; then suddenly she cried :

“ I see it all now ! I could not understand before why you should have taken the trouble to rescue me. Know that here I bear the name of Fatma, and that it was to me that your note and medicine were delivered.”

“ But my sister—Zoraide !” cried Mustapha bitterly. “ What has become of them ? ”

“ Both are in the castle,” replied she ; “ but one of Thuli’s mad fancies is that we all receive new names when we enter his house. Fatma and Zoraide are at present called Mirza and Nurmahal. As for me, my true name is Namouna.”

On learning thus that once more his plans were ruined, Mustapha was for a moment overcome with despair. The young girl rushed towards him to sup-

port him, for he was staggering like a drunken man, and he would have certainly fallen, and perhaps struck his head against the corner of one of the tombs, if Namouna had not wound her arms round him and kept him up.

"Think of thy sister ! think of thy betrothed !" she cried. "Recall your courage, Mustapha. Listen ! Perhaps I can still show you a way in which both of them may be delivered."

"Speak ! quick !" exclaimed Mustapha, reanimated by this thought. "And may the hope that you are about to give me not vanish like those by which I have been already deceived."

"I have only been here for five months," replied Namouna, "but from the first day of my entrance into Thuli's seraglio, I have had but one idea in my head—escape!—and day and night I have thought and dreamed of nothing but the means of succeeding in this. Did you see a magnificent fountain in the great court ? Ever since my arrival, I have thought about that fountain. Some workmen were then occupied in repairing it, and I could examine at leisure

the construction of the aqueduct by which it is supplied with water. The water comes from nearly a mile off. The course of a brook has been turned into a covered passage not less than six feet deep. Ah ! since I made that discovery, how often have I lamented the weakness of my arm. If I could only some night have lifted a single stone of the fountain, it seemed to me that it would be easy to steal out of the castle through the aqueduct, and gain the open country. The water could not be deep, and even if one were drowned, would not death be better than such a life ?

“ Now, this road by which I thought of getting out of the seraglio, must also give entrance to it, and I do not doubt that you could succeed in this way, if you had only with you a few strong, determined men to master the slaves on guard every night.”

So spoke Namouna, and the courage of Mustapha began to rise at every word. One thought, however, could not but trouble him. Where could he find those bold and devoted men whose aid was so necessary. As he turned over this difficulty in his mind,

his fingers were playing with the hilt of his dagger—the dagger given him by Mebrouk ; then suddenly he remembered the promise which the robber chief had made to come to him at his first summons.

“Come !” he said to Namouna, and both of them made their way from the gloomy caverns of the castle. In this they had little fear of being observed, for they knew well that no one who could help it would come near these abodes of the dead through the night-time. They succeeded in getting away safely, and by day-break were many miles from Thuli’s palace-prison.

At the first town where they arrived, Mustapha placed Namouna in the house of a poor widow who lived in a retired part of one of the suburbs ; and having bought a horse with the rest of his money, he set out in all haste to the forest where Mebrouk held his camp.

The chieftain received him with great cordiality, and affectionately asked what brought him back so soon. Mustapha narrated to him the story of his unsuccessful attempts, and, explaining the proposed plan, reminded him of his promise to assist him when called

upon. Mebrouk listened with attention, and was evidently pleased by his friend's courage and perseverance. He could not help smiling at the grotesque name of Chakamankabudibaba ; but when he heard of the treachery of the dwarf, he was greatly exasperated, and swore to strangle the wretch with his own hands as soon as he could lay hold on him.

"As for thee, my friend," said the robber, pressing Mustapha's hand, "I am very much obliged to thee for having placed such confidence in my word. Tomorrow we shall set out, and, by Heaven, somehow or other we must rescue your sister and her friend from the claws of Thuli. I know the old rascal well, and this is not the first time that I have served him a bad trick."

Mustapha embraced him, for words could not tell his gratitude and delight. With such powerful help, he did not doubt that the deliverance of his sister must be at hand.

Next day Mebrouk and Mustapha set out, followed by several men well armed and ready for everything. They made such great haste, that in two days they

arrived at the town where Namouna was living, and taking her with them, they all made their way into the wood which had already given shelter to Mustapha after Hassan's treachery.

While waiting for the night, Namouna minutely described to them the interior disposition of the seraglio, and the passages which they must follow to arrive at the apartment occupied by Fatma and Zoraide. At length the propitious darkness came, and the little troop made its way to the brook from which the aqueduct ran into the castle. Here Namouna was left under the care of one man, while four others, furnished with torches of resinous wood, plunged into the dark vault of the aqueduct, and were followed by Mustapha and their master.

They had to walk more than half-an-hour waist-deep in water before arriving at the fountain itself. The masonry of it was thick and solid, but, attacked at once by four strong men armed with picks and crowbars, it soon began to shake. A flag of marble was removed, and furnished an opening wide enough for the passage of one man at a time. Mustapha

led the way, and in a minute all of the daring adventurers stood in the court-yard. Taking care to hide themselves in the shadow of the fountain, they held a hurried council of war as to their next proceeding.

Luckily, Namouna's descriptions were so exact, that there was no need for long hesitation. Following, as she had bid them, three turns of a covered gallery bordered with oranges and laurels, they arrived at a kind of watch-tower, beneath which they were to count six doors before coming to the one that led to the harem, and which would also be known by its being decorated with crescents.

There it was at length before them, this door. A thread of light through the chinks showed that some one was watching within. What was to be done to open it? To use violence would be to risk all.

Mebrouk approached, and rapped lightly with the hilt of his dagger.

"Holà! Open at once!" he said, in a low voice.

Deceived by his tone, a slave, half asleep, came to the door. But he had no sooner peeped out than it

was dashed open, and the assailants sprang into the seraglio.

A smothered cry was heard. Mebrouk had recognised the voice of the dwarf. Like a thunderbolt he hurled himself on the traitor, and grasped him by the throat. The little monster writhed convulsively, like a serpent, under the hand of iron which held him, but his struggles were in vain, and in another moment he was gagged and bound.

Meanwhile, Mustapha, seizing one of the eunuchs, and holding a dagger to his throat, obliged him to show the chamber of Nurmahal and Mirza, that is to say, Zoraide and Fatma. One moment's anxiety—fear lest he should be again disappointed—the next, in a sort of delirium of joy, he was pressing to his heart the objects of his long search.

“Let us leave at once!” cried Mebrouk. “Every moment I expect to hear the alarm given.”

They made haste to act on this advice, but Mebrouk's haste was not too great to prevent him plunging his dagger into the dwarf before they left the seraglio. This done, he followed his companions

into the gallery, leaving the eunuchs too frightened to raise the alarm for a moment. The court-yard was safely gained just as loud shrieks began to burst forth from the windows. All the party had descended into the aqueduct before Thuli knew that his new favourites had been taken from him. The other end was reached in safety; fleet horses were waiting, and in an hour the fugitives were beyond all pursuit.

The rest of our story may be briefly told.

Mebrouk at once set off for his forest camp, to the great grief of his new friends, who could not but be struck by the courage and courtesy which seemed to fit him for a nobler path in life. A great mystery evidently hung over this celebrated robber. Mustapha guessed that some fatal and terrible event in his early life must have driven him into these lawless courses, but he knew his fierce, impatient temper too well to ask any indiscreet questions. So they parted with mutual expressions of friendship, and Mustapha saw him no more, though he often heard of his dauntless and unscrupulous exploits, and had cause

to wonder if this could be the man who had so zealously and faithfully befriended him in his need.

Namouna returned to Balsora in disguise, and soon succeeded in finding a felucca from Tunis, which bore her safely back to her own country.

The others, after a short voyage, which seemed endlessly long, re-entered Alcara in a sort of triumph, amid the joyful acclamations of the people, who had looked on the troubles of this family as a public misfortune.

This unhopcd-for return caused Mustapha's father such agitation, that he almost died in the suddenness and fulness of his joy. A flood of tears relieved him, and soon his strength returned under the gentle caresses of his dear Fatma. By his orders a great feast was prepared, to which all the town, rich and poor, were invited; and there, before a crowd of relations and friends, Mustapha had to relate the wonderful adventures of his journey, and the changes of fortune which he had experienced before finding the dear ones whose loss had been caused by his

imprudence, and who had now been rescued by his courage and perseverance.

So wonderful did the story seem, that most of his hearers might have been inclined to believe that he was romancing, if his account had not been confirmed by the two girls. Their grateful admiration of their deliverer's prowess was evident to all, though they could scarcely find words in which to express it. But this was not his only reward.

When Mustapha had finished the tale, his father rose and tottered towards him, supported by Fatma and Zoraide. He placed the latter, at once confused and delighted, in the arms of his son, and said to him, in a voice trembling with emotion :

"Oh, my child ! I remove my curse from your head. Take this maiden as the reward due to your indefatigable bravery, and with her receive the blessing of your old father."

Then raising his aged hands to heaven, he added, in a more solemn tone :

"May our town always possess men who resemble

you, and may the example of your filial piety and fraternal love keep always alive in the hearts of future generations the sacred flame of noble courage and devotion."



THE DANGEROUS SECRET.





THE DANGEROUS SECRET.

THE inns of Spain are said to be bad enough at the present time, but two centuries ago they were much worse. In these days they were little better than caravanseries, frequented by muleteers, who expected to find nothing in them but a litter of straw for themselves and their beasts. Only a few of the most comfortable had, besides a stable and a public hall, a sort of attic divided into several compartments, dignified by the name of chambers, to reach which one had to mount a ladder, and perhaps to break one's shins or one's head. Furniture there was generally none but a bed, where the weary traveller might repose on a mattress of raw wool, and

cover himself, if he pleased, with sheets that were changed once every spring.

Now it was into such a luxurious chamber in a certain inn, that, on a certain evening, there had just entered Don José de Fuez d'Alcantara. He was a real gentleman by birth—what Asturian is not? He had just received his degree of doctor from the University of Salamanca; he wore his cloak and sword with the air of a prince—but he possessed nothing in the world beyond the said cloak and sword, a handful of small coins, and a very good opinion of himself.

Although he was scarcely thirty years old, he had already tried his luck in several professions, without finding in any of them even a prospect of that prosperous position in life which he thought himself eminently fitted to adorn. But his was a spirit that was not easily crushed by ill-success; and he was now returning to Leon, in the hope of obtaining employment from Don Alonzo Mendos, who possessed near Zamora a splendid estate, which our doctor had already visited.

But Don José was reckoning on a vain expectation.

The very first questions he put to the landlord of the inn elicited the information that the great man whose patronage he had hoped to secure was just dead.

"Don Alonzo dead!" he repeated, with a stupefied air.

"And buried," said the innkeeper,—*"splendidly buried, as became a gentleman of his rank and fortune. Oh yes! splendidly buried—beautifully buried."*

"But then the castle is occupied by his heirs."

"Heirs! His only heir is his nephew, who has ordered Perez Cavallos, the lawyer of Argelles, to sell the whole estate. To-morrow, I believe, it is to be handed over to the new proprietor, whoever bids highest."

For the moment, Don José was dumbfounded, but presently he bethought him that this purchaser would require the services of clever men to help him in managing his new property, and would probably be only too glad to engage a doctor of Salamanca. So, after a moment's reflection, he declared that he would stay at the inn, and wait for the sale.

The innkeeper highly approved of this resolution,

and assured him that nowhere would he find better fare, or better lodging. He supported this boast by calling attention to the conveniences and elegancies of the room which he had given to the traveller. Perhaps the less he might have said about this subject would have been the better. The room was certainly well aired, for three panes of glass were missing in the window, which had never contained more than four, and as it was set in the roof, there was an extensive view of the sky. As for furniture, there was nothing but a wooden bed, a lame stool, and a shaky table; but the gaps that were between the pieces of the woodwork, did very well, remarked the host with great truth, instead of cupboards and drawers.

The greater part of these nooks were filled with dirty rags, broken crockery, glass bottles, and such like rubbish, but some of them Don José was surprised to see contained books and papers. The host explained that all this had been left there by an old doctor, who for several months had lived in this chamber, spending his whole time in reading, writing,

and distilling the juices of plants. But it having become suspected that he was of Moorish blood, and a recent decree of the king having strictly ordered the banishment of every member of that race, he was obliged to depart suddenly, leaving behind him all his possessions, that is to say, the rags, bottles, books, and papers above mentioned.

Left at length alone by his garrulous host, José de Fuez d'Alcantara could not help reflecting somewhat dismally over the long chain of vexations and accidents which till that day had made his life unsuccessful in every way.

"I have tried everything in vain," he sighed. "Chance has always come to destroy my hopes, and make me the slave of new misfortunes. Ah! how happy is he who can always follow his will, govern circumstances, and be the master of his life, instead of having to submit to all persons and all occasions."

As he found reflections of this kind leading him deeper and deeper into a fit of melancholy, he tried to distract his thoughts by opening one of the books left by the Moorish doctor. It was a "Treatise on

Nature," written in Latin. José looked through a few pages, then chose another volume, which treated of the "Science of Magic," and finally abandoned this for a third, which was about the "Philosopher's Stone."

The contents of these books made pretty clear what direction the old Moor's studies had taken. He had been an alchemist—perhaps a magician! At that time it was not rare, in Spain and elsewhere, to find men who pretended to have studied the art of controlling invisible powers.

His curiosity being roused by these first discoveries, Don José passed from the books to the manuscripts. He ran his eye over several, which seemed to contain instructions for the transmutation of metals, but at length he found, shut up in a leaden case, a paper of greater interest. The very first lines struck him. He held in his hands nothing less than a collection of receipts for performing all the usual prodigies of magic, such as rendering one's-self invisible, changing one's appearance, transporting one's-self from place to place, and the like useful operations. At length he came to a paragraph which was entitled—

"Means of making all your wishes be instantly accomplished."

The young doctor leapt to his feet with sparkling eyes.

"By all that is lucky," he cried, "if this is true, I want nothing more. To get whatever I wish! Is not that the height of human happiness? But let us see if one can manage this safely."

He carefully read the directions given in the manuscript, and found nothing very alarming in them. To obtain the promised gift, all that was necessary was to pronounce a certain form of words, and to drink the contents of a little phial, which, said the manuscript, would be found hidden in the leaden case.

José searched for the phial, found it, and saw that it contained some drops of a black and fragrant liquid. He hesitated before drinking it, not that he doubted the efficacy of the formula, for he was as superstitious as most people of his age, but he wished to be sure that he was not making a mistake. He read over again on the parchment the lines already

deciphered, and besides a postscript, which he only then noticed. This postscript contained these words—

"Our weakness is a barrier which Heaven has wisely opposed to our folly."

"Yes, yes," he murmured; "the old doctor, like the rest of his race, was fond of fine sayings. For the present, I don't want to have anything to do with his morality, but I will try his receipt."

With these words he raised the phial to his lips, and pronounced the long and apparently meaningless formula which was given in the manuscript. He had scarcely finished it before his eyes closed, and he fell fast asleep.

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Don José did not know how long this sleep had lasted, before daylight seemed to penetrate through the skylight of his chamber, and he felt himself to be in that dozing, half-conscious state which precedes thorough awakening. After a time his ideas grew more clear, and then the sight of the roll of parchment and the empty phial reminded him of what had

happened the night before. But as he perceived no change in himself or in things around him, he believed that the Moor's prescription had not worked.

"Ah!" he sighed, "so it was all a delusion, and I awake in my garret with my single doublet and my empty purse. Heaven knows it would be full enough if wishing could make it so! I wish indeed—but so does everybody, and"—

He did not finish the sentence, his eyes fell upon the stool across which he had thrown his clothes. He saw his leather purse protruding from the pocket of his breeches, and bursting with gold pieces!

Trembling with excitement, he jumped out of bed, rubbed his eyes, put out his hand, drew it back again, once more advanced it, seized the purse, held it fast as if afraid it would vanish from between his fingers, and finally poured out the contents on his bed.

They were indeed gold crowns!—more gold crowns than he had ever possessed farthings. The phial was really able to produce its promised effect! From henceforth he would have the power of obtaining all that he wished.

Eager to make a second experiment that very moment, he wished that his garret should be changed into a sumptuous chamber, and his threadbare clothes into a brand new costume of black velvet lined with satin. His desire was immediately accomplished. Next he required a breakfast fit for a duke, served up by little negroes dressed in scarlet. The repast at once appeared, spread out on a table that seemed to spring up from the ground, and with it entered the little negroes bearing wines and chocolate. Every luxury that his mind could think of was as promptly furnished, and Don José ate more than he had ever eaten in his life.

For some time he continued thus to prove his new power in all ways he could think of, and when he had at length acquired a firm conviction of its reality, he rushed out of the inn in a frenzy of joy impossible to describe.

In truth, then, this roll of parchment had made him in a few hours richer than the richest, stronger than the most powerful. HE COULD DO WHATEVER HE WISHED. How much was contained in these

words, and how he felt himself growing in his own esteem as he repeated them. Beside him what were lords, dukes, kings, emperors, nay, even the pope himself? All these were restrained by fixed laws and boundaries, while as for him, his power had not any limit but that of his imagination. How lucky it was that the Moorish doctor's parchment had not fallen into the hands of an ignorant, covetous, ill-principled man, but had been thrown in the way of a gentleman like himself, reasonable in his wishes, master of his passions, and doctor of the University of Salamanca ! Mankind might be assured Don José de Fuez d'Alcantara respected himself too much to abuse his unlimited power. It had no doubt been given to him as worthy to receive it, and he resolved to justify the confidence of Providence by his conduct.

He would at once give a first proof of this by himself moderating his ambition. In his place any one else would have desired to be a king, with a palace, courtiers, an army ; but Don José did not care for greatness. He decided that he would content himself with buying the estate of Alonzo Mendos, and living

there, with some millions, the title of count, and the privileges of a grandee of Spain, like a true and moderately-minded philosopher. So without delay he set out for the village of Argelles, where the sale of the castle was to take place.

The road which he had taken led also to the market-town of Toro, and it was covered with peasants, muleteers, and merchants, who were travelling in the same direction. As he went along, Don José looked to right and left, and here and there made little trials of his power. To the young girl who hurried along gay and smiling, he wished a happy meeting with her sweetheart ; to the old man scarcely able to move his feeble limbs, a lift in a passing cart ; to the poor beggar, a piece of gold rolling unexpectedly at his feet ; and all these wishes were accomplished on the spot.

Encouraged by this success, Don José was ambitious of playing a still more important part. He would be a minister of justice as well as of charity. So he punished the swaggering soldier by a puff of wind that blew his fine hat and feathers into the river ;

the farmer too cruel in belabouring his mules, by laming them, and dispersing them over the country ; the great man who seemed from the height of his carriage to regard too disdainfully the foot passengers trudging alongside him, José rebuked by breaking one of the wheels of his gorgeous equipage, and sending him flying into the dusty road. In all this, Don José only obeyed the impulse of the moment, distributing reward or punishment without the slightest reflection, as anything pleased or displeased him.

Thus he arrived in sight of the castle of Mendos, the magnificent woods of which bordered the whole road. Wishing to escape the increasing heat of the sun, he took a side path which he knew, and by which he could reach the village as well as by the road.

It was one of the finest days of summer ; the hedgerows were covered with flowers, and the forest resounded with a thousand songs of birds. Some woodcutters, encamped in huts of boughs, were cutting up the fallen wood, and transforming it into different articles of furniture. Don José made up his mind

that when the property belonged to him, he would arrange this business according to certain ideas of his own. He even traced in pencil, on a corner of his parchment, the plan of a forest village in which comfort and picturesqueness were to be happily joined. When he reached the meadows, he was also of opinion that the watering of them ought to be better managed, and calculated the profit which would arise from the improvements he should make when he came into possession. He was better pleased with the vines; but as for the corn-fields, he resolved to turn them all into pastures, and make new ones by tilling a barren heath that at present seemed turned to no purpose.

He had got this length in his projects as new proprietor, when a sharp and imperious voice asked who had given him leave to pass through the lands of Mendos, and turning abruptly round, he saw a young man, richly dressed, and mounted on a fine Andalusian horse.

Instead of answering at once, Don José began to examine the new-comer, so he repeated his question with an accent of impatience. The doctor of Sala-

manca smiled with that calm and confident air which a consciousness of power gives.

"Must one ask leave to visit an estate which has no master?" he replied.

"Who told you that it had none?" returned the cavalier.

"I have been informed that the late owner is just dead, and that a lawyer of Argelles has been directed to sell it this very day."

"Oh! so you come as a purchaser?"

"As a purchaser, sir."

"And do you know what is the price demanded?"

"I hope to learn presently," said Don José, very politely, though the other's tone was by no means civil.

"The valuation has been four hundred thousand gold crowns."

"The estate is worth more."

The young gentleman burst out laughing.

"Upon my honour, here is a rich purchaser, and one who travels in a very modest style, considering his fortune!" he cried, mockingly.

"I generally go on foot."

"That is too humble of you. Your lordship would surely be better off on my steed, wouldn't you?"

"Do you think so?" asked Don José, seized with a sudden idea.

"So much so, that I am tempted to get off, and offer you my seat," continued the cavalier, more and more scornfully.

"You can be easily satisfied," said the doctor, and muttered: "I wish you to be on the ground."

At that moment the horse suddenly reared, and threw its young master on the grass.

"You have frightened my horse!" he cried, picking himself up, pale with anger, and advancing towards Don José, who held the horse by the bridle, and was preparing to mount.

"I have only helped you to fulfil your intentions," he said; but the other came running up to him brandishing his whip, and crying—

"Leave it alone, you impudent fellow, or I will cut you over the face!"

The blood flushed in Don José's cheeks.

"You forget that you are speaking to a gentleman, and that I wear a sword as well as you do," he said, proudly.

"Come on, then! Let us see what use you can make of it," replied the cavalier, unsheathing his own blade, and rushing upon the doctor.

On any other occasion, our friend would have tried every means of conciliation, but the threat of the young stranger had moved his indignation, and the certainty of having nothing to fear gave him unusual courage. He thought, besides, that his adversary stood in need of a lesson, and *wished* this fiery young gentleman might receive such a wound as would give him an opportunity of reflecting on the consequences of getting into a passion. This desire was almost immediately followed by its effect, for they had no sooner crossed swords, than his adversary let his fall with an exclamation of pain and rage. Don José, who was sure that he had only wished for a slight wound, did not trouble himself more about it, and, to play out the part that he had undertaken, politely asked the cavalier to excuse him for what had

happened, adding that he himself bore no ill-will, and to prove it, would accept the offer of a loan of the gentleman's horse. With these words he raised his hat, sprung on the horse, and cantered off to the village.

What had just happened did not tend to weaken Don José's good opinion of himself. He had amazed, dismounted, wounded a man of rank, and he felt equally pleased with his courage and his wit. He now knew for certain that nothing could oppose his will, that he was able to break down all opposition, to humble all pride; and he had already grown so accustomed to the thought, that he was not in the least astonished at it. The only thing which did astonish him was, that any one should even think of resisting him. He could not bear it—he looked upon it as a revolt against his legitimate rights; so, in passing through the village, he was on the point of knocking down a muleteer who was too slow in standing out of his way. The instinct of tyranny swelled up in his heart like a spring-tide.

He presented himself before the man of business who was said to be commissioned to sell the castle;

but he did not conduct himself so much like a buyer who wished to learn the price, the conditions of sale, and so forth, as like a master who was come to take possession of what belonged to him. Unfortunately his dreams were rudely dispelled. Perez, the lawyer, at once informed him that the castle of Mendos was no longer for sale.

You may guess the disappointment and disgust of the doctor. This estate, on which he was planning so many changes and improvements, had slipped out of his fingers. And yet he was the man who could have everything by simply wishing for it. It was impossible! The very idea of any such opposition to his desires chafed him, and it was with an air of pride almost amounting to a fit of passion that he demanded of the lawyer why the estate was no longer to be sold.

"Because," replied the latter, "Don Henriquez, the late Count's nephew, has just succeeded to another property, and he has decided to sell it, and to keep Mendos."

"What!" exclaimed Don José. "Whatever price may be offered him?"

"He will refuse."

"You are sure?"

"He told me so himself, this morning."

"Is he here, then?"

"He has just set out on horseback for the castle."

Don José understood that this must be the unknown cavalier, and could not restrain an exclamation. The lawyer replied only by compliments and condolences, adding that Don Henriquez was particularly anxious to preserve this estate, that he might enjoy in the autumn the sport for which it was renowned.

"Hang it!" muttered Don José. "I ought to have wounded him seriously enough to make him lose the hope of enjoying any sport for some autumns to come. I wish he were maimed."

And then he added aloud that surely this would not prevent the owner from selling the estate, if he were offered a sufficiently large sum.

"The property pleases him," said the lawyer. "And certainly it unites many advantages. First, an admirable position."

"I know that," said Don José, sharply.

"Fine woods, rich fields, beautiful gardens."

"I have seen them," again interrupted the doctor, whose covetousness was increased by every word of this description.

"Very well," said the polite lawyer ; "but what your lordship has not seen, perhaps, is the inside of the castle, after it had been improved and embellished by the late Count. First of all, there is a gallery of pictures by our best artists."

"Pictures!" cried Don José. "I have always been extremely fond of pictures, though I am fonder still of statues."

"The castle is quite crammed with them."

"Indeed!"

"Without speaking of the library."

"There is a library?"

"Of thirty thousand volumes."

Don José made a gesture of despair.

"And such a treasure to be lost!" he exclaimed. "Such a mine of knowledge to be given over to an ignorant fellow; for this Don Henriquez of yours is probably ignorant."

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"Your lordship knows that he is a young man of good family, rich, and fond of amusement."

"I was sure of it. He is a dissipated trifler."

"He is rich, very rich. What could you expect in a young man of such large property? The only real fault one has to find in him is, that he is rather hot-tempered, and thus has already been led into quarrels with several gentlemen."

"Just so! A brawler, a duellist!" continued the doctor, painting the character of his rival in the blackest colours. "I might have known that;" and in a lower tone he added—"The best thing would be to take away from him the means of indulging this dangerous disposition, by depriving him of the hand which holds the sword. It would only be justice."

"Age will correct his hastiness," went on Perez, "and also, I hope, the extravagant tastes of his lordship. For he is very extravagant, and, in spite of his large income, is always in debt. He has already been obliged to call upon his uncle's tenants for all their arrears of rent."

"And they have paid them?"

"With great difficulty, for, to tell the truth, the last crops were very poor."

"Why this is cruelty!" cried Don José, indignantly. "What! to press hard on poor people who are themselves in want, when he has a fortune fit for a prince, a castle with grounds and woods, pictures and statues without end, and a library of thirty thousand volumes! Such a man is a veritable scourge, and it were to be desired, for the public sake, that Spain were well rid of him!"

He was interrupted by a noise of voices and steps resounding on the staircase, and by the appearance of a servant who rushed into the room in a state of wild alarm.

"What's the matter? what's the matter?" asked the lawyer.

"A misfortune!—oh, a great misfortune! Don Henriquez has just been fighting."

"Again?"

"And he was wounded."

"Dangerously?—yes?"

"No. But his adversary escaped upon our master's own horse, and while he was trying to pursue him, he fell in such a way as to aggravate his wound, and no one coming to his assistance, he fainted on the road-side."

"Have they found him there?"

"Not until a passing waggon went over him, and crushed his right hand."

"Good heavens!"

"They raised him up, and"—

"Then he is saved?"

"Alas! no. As they were bearing him through the court, they passed under a mason's scaffold, and a stone fell, and mortally wounded my poor master. He will never speak again."

Don José staggered as if a thunderbolt had struck him. All this had been his doing while standing in the lawyer's room. First he had wished for Don Henriquez a severer hurt, which might prevent him from enjoying the chase; next the loss of the hand in which he held his sword; then death;—and three successive accidents had immediately responded to his

three wishes. Thus, after having tortured and maimed a man, he had just killed him. This thought pierced his heart like an arrow, for, with all his selfishness, José was tender-hearted. He wished to repel it by telling himself that it was impossible this horrible story could be true, but at that very moment the door opened, and four servants appeared, bearing the bleeding and motionless body of their young lord.

Don José could not bear the sight ; his brain reeled—a violent shiver ran through his body—all around him disappeared, and——

* * * * *

He found himself lying on his mattress in the wretched attic of the inn, into which the sun's early rays were beginning to stream through the open window.

The first feeling of the doctor was one of joy at having escaped from this horrible vision ; then the remembrance of what had happened the night before came into his mind, and he understood it all.

The Moor's potion must have been one of those

powerful narcotics which, by exalting our faculties during sleep, transform into dreams the ideas that are habitual to us in our waking hours. All that he had taken for reality must have been only such a dream.

Don José thought over it for some time in silence. Then he took up the roll of parchment, which still lay on the floor, and read it again. This time he paused over the sentence which the night before he had taken scarcely any notice of, and after reading it several times, shook his head, and said :

“This will be a wholesome lesson, and one which I shall profit by, if I have any sense. I believed that, to be happy, it was enough to be able to have one’s own will, without considering that the will of man, when it is no longer bridled by circumstances, passes from pride to extravagance, and from extravagance to tyranny, and from tyranny to cruelty. Alas! the Moorish doctor was right: *Our weakness is a barrier which Heaven has wisely opposed to our folly.*”



NEITHER DEAD NOR ALIVE.



NEITHER DEAD NOR ALIVE.

MY father," said one of a company of travelling merchants, addressing his fellow-travellers in reply to their request that he should narrate to them a tale,—“my father kept a small shop in the town of Ahmeira. He had nothing to do with the adventure which I am going to relate, and I merely mention him to say, that all his life he attended to a small but steady business, gained just enough to support himself and me, his only son, kept clear of all speculations, and above all, had a horror of the sea, on which he said that more lives and more money had been lost than in all lands of the world. But I did not share this dislike, and I fear I often grieved the good

old man by my openly manifested preference for a life of adventure and excitement. While he was alive, however, I complied with his wishes, and put a check on my desires ; but when, in my twenty-first year, he went the way of all flesh, I resolved to devote myself to a life which would enable me both to gratify my roaming propensities, and, as I hoped, to make a larger and speedier fortune than my father's business seemed likely to afford me.

As soon as the time of mourning for my father had passed, I sold his shop and stock to one of our neighbours, invested the proceeds in such merchandise as I thought likely to give me a profitable return, and set out for India with a single companion. This was an old servant of ours, who had lived in our house all his life, and having conceived a real attachment for me, was not willing to leave me when our home was broken up. Knowing his intelligence and fidelity, I was glad to avail myself of his services, and together we set out for Eklara, the nearest seaport town. Here we embarked with our goods on board a fine ship, and left port with a favourable wind. I was full of hope and

spirits, feeling confident that when I next returned to my native country, it would be to take my place among its richest and most prosperous traders.

We had been about fifteen days at sea when we observed the captain's countenance to wear a disturbed look, and, on pressing him as to the cause of his uneasiness, learned that he had reason to suspect that a storm was at hand. As yet we saw no signs which might justify his alarm, but the captain was evidently much frightened, and we attributed this partly to his being of a timorous nature, and partly to his ignorance of the sea in which we now were.

The sails were furled, and we lay waiting for what might happen. The night was bright and still ; not even a breath of air seemed to move the sea, much less such a storm as the captain had predicted. He was inclined to confess that, after all, he might have been mistaken in the signs which had warned him, and we were beginning to laugh at his gloomy predictions, when suddenly appeared a sight that struck a chill to the stoutest hearts on board. A ship of strange shape and enormous size, which till that moment no one on

board had noticed, was seen gliding across our bows, and so near, that I expected to hear a crash announce that the two vessels had touched each other. But there was no sound except an exclamation of horror here and there on our deck. The captain, who was standing by my side, became white as a sheet.

“My ship is lost!” he cried. “Death is sailing by our side. Heaven have mercy on us!”

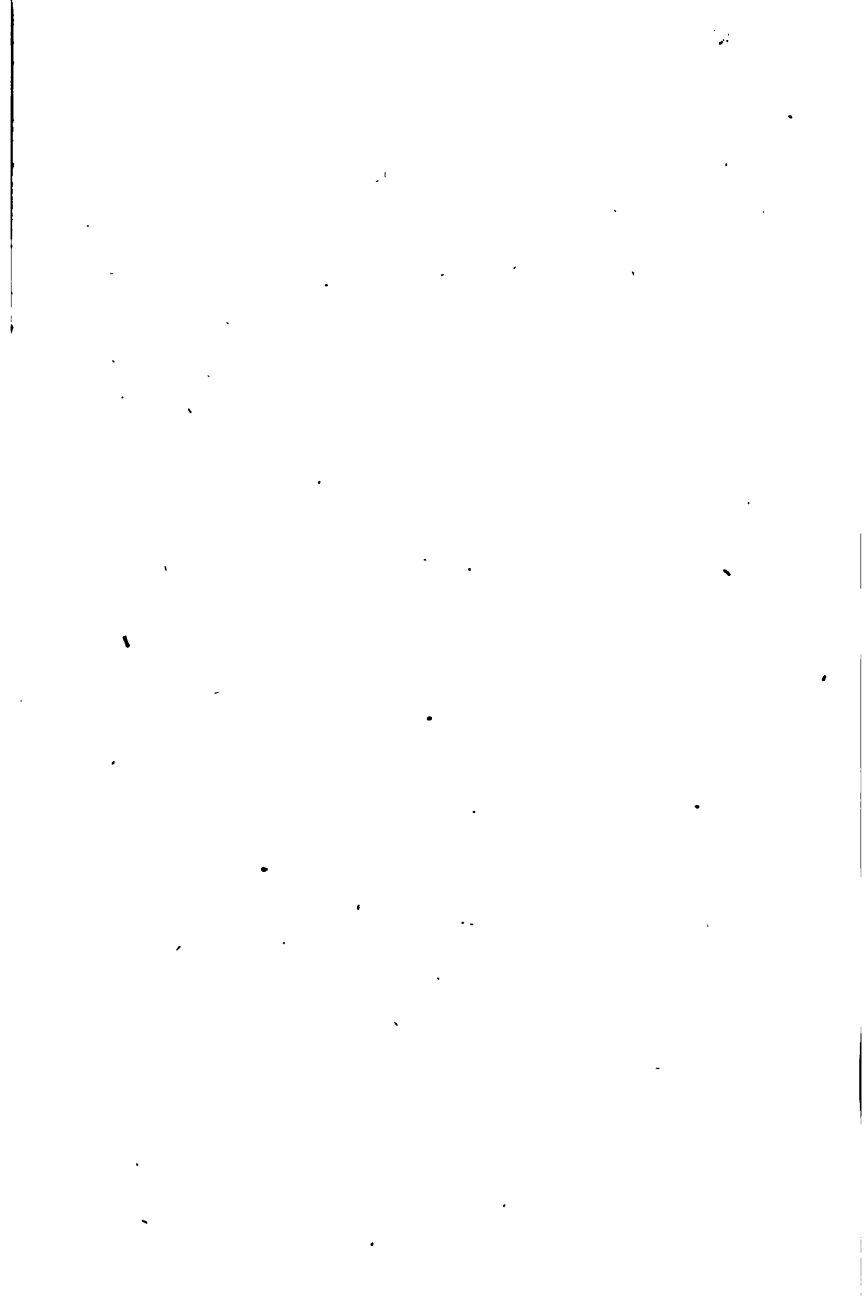
Before I had time to ask him a single question, the sailors flocked round him, crying and lamenting.

“Have you seen it? Have you seen it? Unfortunate men that we are! no one ever saw the Cursed Ship and lived!”

The captain was as frightened as his crew, but he did his best to calm them by reading a few verses from the Koran and offering up a short prayer. He then took his station at the helm, and prepared to direct our course. Every precaution was taken, and not too late, for the calmness of the evening had now suddenly been disturbed, and a dark tempest was gathering thick round us. Before long it burst upon our devoted vessel, and from the first we gave ourselves up



‘The calmness of the evening had now suddenly been disturbed, and a dark tempest was gathering thick round us.’—STORIES FROM OVER THE SEA, page 84.



for lost. Courage and energy seemed to have deserted the sailors, and the captain soon abandoned all attempt to work the ship, which in less than an hour struck upon a hidden rock and began to sink rapidly.

We threw ourselves into the boats, and did our utmost to keep ourselves afloat upon the furious waves. It was hopeless to think of steering in one direction or the other ; we felt ourselves abandoned to the mercy of the tempest, which still continued. . That dreadful night seemed never to be coming to an end. We longed for day, though we knew not what fresh disaster it might bring us. And indeed, just as the first rays of dawn appeared, a sudden hurricane from a new and unexpected quarter caught our frail boat and upset it. I saw no more of my companions who had escaped with me from the wreck, except my old servant, Ibrahaim. When, after a long period of unconsciousness, I returned to my senses, I found myself lying in the boat and in his arms. The brave and faithful fellow had not only succeeded in rescuing me from the waves, but in righting the boat and dragging both

himself and my helpless body on board it. The rest had all been swallowed up by the pitiless sea.

The fury of the storm had abated, and standing upright in our shallop, which by this time was almost broken to pieces and could scarcely serve to protect us longer, we examined every quarter of the horizon, in the hope of perceiving some sign of succour. We had again and again been disappointed, when at length we were rejoiced by the sight of a ship appearing from a haze that lay round the south, in which direction the wind was luckily carrying us, for our oars had been swept away when the boat was overturned. When we had approached to within a short distance of this vessel, I recognised it as the same which had passed so close to us the night before, and the appearance of which had caused such alarm to the captain and sailors. I shuddered in my turn. The exclamation of the captain, which had proved so fatally true; the deserted air of the ship; the ghostly way in which it glided through the water without a sign of human life on board; the cries which we uttered without receiving any answer—all this produced on our minds a strange

impression of fear and awe. But it was our only means of safety, and men who had just been so near death were not to be repulsed by mere mystery.

Working with our hands and feet so as to supply, as well as possible, the place of oars, we at length were able to come alongside the mysterious ship. But it was in vain that we hailed it. We shouted with all our might. Nothing stirred on the deck above. A long rope was hanging over the side; I seized it, and in another moment stood upon the deck.

What a sight met my eyes! Even now, when so many years have passed by, I cannot recall it without shuddering with horror.

The deck was red with blood. Twenty or thirty corpses lay here and there on the planks. Against the mainmast was reared the form of a man richly dressed and with a splendid scimitar in his hand, but his face was livid and ghastly. He also was dead. A long iron spike, passing through his skull, nailed him to the mast and kept him upright.

Terror arrested my foot; I could scarcely move or breathe; and when my companion joined me on the

blood-stained deck, he was equally overpowered at the sight of these helpless corpses heaped up around us. We took courage, however, and after having invoked the protection of the Prophet, ventured to advance. Every step which we made discovered fresh horrors. And what seemed to make them more horrible was the silence which reigned around. Not a breath, not a stir, nothing moved, nothing was alive but ourselves and the great solemn ocean, which, stretching around us as far as we could see, heaved peacefully like the breast of a sleeping child.

When we had made our way to the ladder by which the ship's cabins were to be reached, we paused and looked at one another, as if each wished to learn in the other's face whether his courage would lead him further.

"Oh, master!" said my faithful servant at length, "something dreadful has happened here, and perhaps the murderers are still in the ship; but, come what may, let us descend, for I can no longer bear to behold this horrible sight."

Below, as on deck, there reigned a deadly silence,

which was only broken by the sound of our steps. We arrived at the door of the cabin. I went down and listened—no voice, no movement. I cautiously pushed open the door, and side by side we stole in.

Nothing here appeared to excite fresh alarm, but the cabin presented an air of great disorder; dresses, dishes, arms, and furniture, lay here and there in strange confusion—nothing was in its place. A splendid repast followed by a desperate struggle would appear to have recently taken place, for everything was stained by wet marks of wine and blood. Strange to say, the bones of a small four-footed animal, probably a dog, were lying in a corner, in such a state of decomposition that they crumbled away as soon as we touched them. Years must have passed since its death, but the blood of the human corpses was not yet dry.

We pursued our inspection from deck to deck and from cabin to cabin. Everywhere we found marks of wealth and elegance not commonly met with on board merchant vessels; and in the hold was a rich cargo of silk, pearls, gold-dust, and other rare and valuable

commodities. This discovery for a moment made me forget my fears. I had set out to seek my fortune, and here it was so soon and so unexpectedly found. If there was no one but ourselves alive in the ship, I thought we should be justified in taking possession of the whole; and already I was allowing myself to rejoice in my good fortune, when Ibrahim, whose older head was less heated by this discovery, reminded me that we had not as yet much to be joyful for, seeing that all the wealth of India could not benefit us unless we could find some means of gaining the land.

However, we were glad to refresh ourselves with the rich meats and drinks which abounded in the chief cabin; and after we had eaten, our spirits as well as our bodies were so much invigorated, that we resolved to go upon deck again. But again our terror returned at the sight of the corpses, and I cried to Ibrahim—

“Let us throw them overboard, and try to forget!”

Imagine, if you can, our feelings when we found that we could not move one of the dead from his place. Every limb seemed to be held to the planks by enchanted chains, nor could all our united efforts avail so

much as to lift a finger. No more were we able to remove the body of the captain from the mast to which it was fixed, nor to take his sword from his stiff and icy hand. We shuddered and fled below.

Night began to come on, and now neither of us dared to present himself on the enchanted deck. We remained below in the cabin, and sighed for day even more anxiously than we had done the night before, when we were abandoned to the mercy of winds and waves. But I insisted on old Ibrahim sleeping a little to repair his evident exhaustion, and I myself promised to watch, in the hope that some means of succour might present itself.

The moon had just risen, and by the position of the stars I calculated that it must be about eleven o'clock, when I thought I heard a sound in one of the adjacent cabins. Opening the door I stole out, but had not advanced many paces before I was overcome, not by fear, as might have been expected, but by an irresistible inclination to sleep. Involuntarily I allowed myself to fall behind a large cask which was standing near, and gave way to my drowsiness, without seeming

to have the power of considering that I had promised to remain awake. But I could only have been half asleep after all, for I heard distinctly the sea plashing against the sides of the ship, and the wind groaning and sighing among the ropes and sails. Suddenly I was aware of the sound of men's voices and footsteps. I wished to rise—to fly—to awake Ibrahim, but an invisible power was holding my body as if by chains of iron, and I was not even able to open my eyes. The voices became more distinct, and it seemed as if a numerous crew were busy on the deck above. Every now and then the shouts and whistles of the officers came to my ears, and I soon recognised all the various sounds which are heard in working a ship. But consciousness was gradually abandoning me more and more, and in spite of my efforts to resist the spell which had fallen on me, I fell into a heavy slumber, during which I still seemed to hear a more and more confused sound of cries, of fighting men, and the clash of arms.

When I awoke, the sun was already high in the heavens, and through a porthole was beating upon my

face with unpleasant force. I rubbed my eyes, and looked around. Nothing seemed to have been moved. Custom gives us all courage, and in bright noonday the dead are not so terrible. I ventured to ascend the ladder and take a peep on deck. There the corpses lay motionless—motionless was the captain nailed to his mast. Surely the noise which I heard during the night had only existed in my head. I had been dreaming. I returned below and went to seek my old servant, whom I found sitting in the cabin, and apparently plunged in deep and sorrowful meditation.

“Oh, master!” he cried, as I entered the cabin,—“oh, master, master! this is unbearable. I would rather be buried at the bottom of the sea than pass another night in this wretched vessel.”

“What has happened to you?” I asked, eagerly.

“After sleeping some hours,” replied Ibrahim, “I awoke, and heard a noise above my head. At first I thought it might be you, but the noise grew too great to be made by one man. Not less than a score were running about on deck, rattling the ropes and shouting to each other. But this was not the worst. Heavy

steps sounded outside—some one was coming to this cabin. I crept into a corner, and lay shivering and speechless. That door opened. They came in—with such eyes and faces—and that man who is nailed to the mast walked at the head. I don't know how I had strength to look. I saw him sit down at this table, —at this very spot—and eat, and drink, and smoke; and the one who is dressed in scarlet, and lies not far from him on the deck, sat down opposite him. When they had been drinking and smoking together for some time, they seemed to quarrel, and I saw them draw their swords and rush out of the cabin as if they were about to fight on deck. Then my strength gave way. I swooned. As for you, my master, I never expected to see you more, and I dared not set foot beyond the cabin to search for you. Heaven be praised that you have returned in safety, for if I had been left alone here, I believe I should have thrown myself from the porthole before night came on."

So spoke my old servant, and you may think into what trouble his story threw me. It was not, then, an illusion; I had not been dreaming; it was really the

dead men that I had heard shouting and running and fighting about the ship. The very idea of sailing in such company caused me indescribable horror, and I do not know what fatal resolution I might have taken, if my old Ibrahaim had not cried out—

“I remember it! We are safe for the present.”

On my asking him what he meant, he told me that he had just recollected certain verses of the Koran, which his grandfather, a man of great wisdom and experience, and deeply learned in magic, had taught him to be a certain protection against all ghosts and evil spirits.

“We must try,” he added, “to struggle against the unnatural sleep which will doubtless come again upon us to-night, and by fervent prayer and great efforts we shall succeed, and thus shall be able to understand something more of this mystery.”

The words of the old man comforted me a little, but it was not without dread that I saw the night approach, nor was he so certain of the efficacy of his charm as to be able to give me much assurance. We were both determined, however, to go through with

our undertaking, and learn, if possible, why these spirits were thus permitted to trouble the living and the dead. Opening into the chief cabin was a smaller apartment. There we took up our position as soon as it began to grow dark. Ibrahaim wrote the name of the Prophet on each of the four walls, and, with what confidence we could command, we awaited the events of the night.

It might perhaps be about eleven o'clock, when I felt myself seized by a strong desire to sleep. My companion was similarly affected ; but he began to recite prayers and poems, and by this means we succeeded in keeping ourselves awake, till the drowsy feeling yielded to our resolution, and passed completely away.

Then—ah ! how well I remember that moment !—we heard *them* begin to move above us. The rigging creaked, and voices and steps sounded on the deck. Several minutes passed, how many I know not, so full of anxiety were they. Suddenly a noise was heard nearer. They were coming ! They approached—in another moment they would be before us. The old

man began to mutter the sacred verses of which he had spoken, but I had not faith enough in the efficacy of his formula to keep me from bursting into a cold perspiration as the door of the cabin opened.

I shut my eyes for a moment, then opened them again. Dressed in a magnificent costume, and holding himself haughtily erect, the man of the mainmast had just entered. The spike of iron still transfixed his skull, but he had returned his sword to its sheath. Behind him walked another person, a little less richly dressed; and this also I recognised as being one of the bodies which we had seen lying on the deck.

The captain—for the foremost figure could be no other—had a deadly pale face, surrounded, as it were in a frame, with a fringe of black beard, and a fierce light shone in his eyes. I could see him distinctly as he passed before us with his companion—so distinctly, that every line of their countenances has been burned into my brain; but neither of them seemed to take any notice of the door behind which we were crouching. Both sat down at the table in the middle of the

cabin, and talked loudly in a language quite unknown to us. As their conversation proceeded it grew louder and more animated ; they seemed to be getting more and more angry at each other ; and at length the captain struck the table so violently that everything in the cabin shook. The other leapt to his feet with a scornful laugh, and made a sign to the captain as if bidding him to follow. The latter also rose and drew his sword, and both rushed from the cabin.

When they had gone, we breathed more freely ; but our horror was not yet ended. A great tumult seemed to arise on the deck above, and kept increasing. We heard hurried footsteps, and sounds of shouting and screaming—then the clash of arms—and at length a deep silence.

When, after several hours, we dared to remount the deck, we found everything just as we had left it. Not one of the corpses had changed its place ; all were stiff and cold, and in the same positions.

Thus passed several days on board this cursed ship, and each night brought the same scenes of horror, in which the officers and their men feasted, quarrelled,

fought, and were always discovered by us lying cold and still under the morning sun.

We kept steering towards the east, where, if my calculations were true, land ought to be found. But we never seemed to make any progress in this direction. During the day, indeed, we would advance some miles, but we always seemed to go backwards in the night, for we invariably found ourselves in the same place at the rising of the sun. For a long time we could not guess the reason of this phenomenon, but at length it struck us that the dead bodies must every night, when they came to life, turn the ship in the opposite direction from that in which we wished to proceed, and thus balk our endeavours to reach land.

In order to protect ourselves from this danger, which threatened to keep us captive forever in the midst of the ocean, we resolved to furl all the sails before the night came on, and put them beyond the power of the spirits by the same means as we had already used in the cabin. So we wrote on pieces of parchment, first the name of the Prophet, and then

the sacred verses which my servant had learned from his grandfather, and one of these we fastened to each of the sails. Having done this, we anxiously waited to see what would happen. The noise this night appeared to be greater than usual, but in the morning we were delighted to perceive that the sails had not been unfurled. During the day we did not allow them to be useless, and in this way we succeeded in approaching land, slowly it is true, but steadily.

The morning of the seventh day after this showed us land, and by a spontaneous movement we fell on our knees, old Ibrahim and I, to bless Heaven for our wonderful deliverance. The hope of escaping from our floating tomb doubled our strength, and at length we anchored in port, and launching a boat which happened to lie on the deck, we rowed as fast as we could towards the shore. For the moment we forgot all about the wealth which we had so strangely acquired, and rejoiced only that we were once more about to enter the world of the living.

The first thing we did was to seek an inn, and take the repose of which we stood in such need, after so

much fatigue and emotion. When we awoke, I asked our host to recommend me to a wise and learned man who might be able to advise me about matters of magic. He understood me, and directed me to a narrow and retired street, where he informed me that I should have no difficulty in finding the sage Akmar.

“Indeed!” said the sage Akmar, after hearing my story. “It must be in consequence of some crime that these men are thus kept on the sea, neither alive nor dead. The charm will no doubt become powerless if they are conveyed to the shore, but it will be impossible to do this without bringing the planks on which they are laid.”

I promised to reward him well if he would help me to do this. He consented, and we set out together for the ship, followed by five slaves provided with saws and hatchets. On the way, the old sage told me that we had done quite right in rolling verses of the Koran round the sails.

“If this idea had not struck you,” he said, “you would still have been wandering in the middle of the

ocean. But the sacred verses forbid the approach of all spirits."

It was still early when we arrived at the ship's side. We at once set to work, and before long, three dead bodies, along with the planks they lay on, had been lowered into our boat. Two slaves took them to land to bury them ; but when they came back, they told us that the corpses had spared them all trouble, for as soon as the boat touched land, they had each become a little heap of dust.

We continued our work, and before evening, all the bodies were taken on shore, and had all crumbled to pieces in the same way, as soon as land was reached. Only one at length remained on board, that which was nailed to the mainmast ; but we tried in vain to extract from the wood the spike that transfixed its skull. No force, no skill, no tool, could move it in the least degree. I did not know what to do, unless we cut the mast ; but Akmar hit upon a plan. He sent one of the slaves on shore for a vase full of earth, and having pronounced certain mysterious words above it, he poured it upon the dead man's head. Immediately

the eyes of the corpse began to roll in their sockets, he heaved a deep sigh, and at the same moment the wound in his forehead began to bleed, the spike loosened of its own accord, and the unfortunate man fell into our arms.

“Who has brought me here?” said a feeble voice, which made us all start, for it was the voice of a corpse.

Akmar pointed me out with his finger, and the reviving lips went on to say with difficulty—“Accept my blessing, young stranger. You have at length rescued me from a long and dreadful suffering. For fifty years my body has been wandering on these waves in the state in which you found it, and every night my spirit has been obliged to return for a short and horrible glimpse of life. But now earth has touched my brow, and the charm is broken, Heaven be praised, and a thousand thanks to you, my friends, who have not feared to search out the secret by which my corpse was enchanted.”

I begged him to tell us how he had fallen into that deplorable condition, and he replied—

“I know not if my sad story will interest you, but

such as it is, I will spend the last few moments of my life in letting you know it.

“ Fifty years ago I was a powerful chieftain living at Tunis. I was rich enough to be independent of all business, but, enticed by the thirst of gain, and wishing more freely to gratify my propensities towards extravagance and dissipation, I fitted out a ship, of which I was both captain and sole owner ; and so lucky was I in my speculations, that before long I found myself on the highroad to becoming the richest of all the merchants I knew. But still I ever desired to increase my fortune ; and though each time I set out on a fresh voyage, I resolved that it should be the last, each time that I returned successful I broke through my resolution, and year after year found me still engaged in the same kind of life.

“ It happened that, in one of my voyages, I took on board a poor dervish who was returning from Mecca. My companions were no more than myself careful about piety or good manners, and we paid little heed to the sacred character of this good man, nor did his meek and inoffensive conduct serve to protect him

against our rudeness. More than once, indeed, he was treated by us with ridicule, and even with cruelty, and he scarcely reproached us with our inhospitable behaviour. But one day when I had intoxicated myself, his holy zeal was moved to rebuke me, and in my fury I hurled him to the ground and planted my dagger in his throat. He died, but not before he had cursed me and all my crew. This was the curse which he pronounced upon us—that we should be able neither to die nor to live, till earth had covered our heads. We threw the unfortunate dervish into the sea and laughed at his predictions, but the night was not over before it was accomplished in dreadful reality. Part of my crew, led by my lieutenant, mutinied against me, and we fought with the fiercest rage, until all those who remained faithful to me had fallen after a desperate resistance, and I was a prisoner in the hands of those scoundrels. They nailed me to the mainmast in the way you have seen, but my cruel murderers did not long live to exult in their victory. Before many hours had passed, every one of them perished from the severe

wounds which they had received, and soon my gallant ship was only a vast tomb.

“My eyes closed, my breathing ceased ; I thought I was dying. But alas ! the prediction of the dervish was but too true. Life had left me, but I could not die.

“I remained motionless and insensible all day, but the next night, at the same hour and minute when we had thrown the dervish into the sea, I came to myself again, and all my shipmates with me, and we found ourselves doomed to re-enact the scene of our mutual destruction. And every night life was thus granted to us for a few hours, but we were not able to do or say anything but what we had said or done on that wretched night.

“This dreadful punishment has lasted for fifty years, and might have lasted forever, if you had not had the resolution to penetrate the mystery, and the humanity to free us from that curse which so deservedly fell on my doomed vessel and all its crew.

“It was with a savage joy that, with all our sails spread, we used to plunge into the thick of the tempest,

hoping that the elements might prove stronger than the curse of the dervish, and that we might strike upon some rock or be swamped by some wave. Wretched beings that we were! death refused to receive us who had been banished from life. But now at length I am delivered from the curse. I feel life throbbing in my veins with the blood. Thanks—oh! once more thanks—my unknown deliverer. If treasures—gold, much gold—can reward you—take my ship. I give it you—a small—too small proof of my gratitude. Adieu!”

Thus spoke the captain, and letting his head fall on his breast, he expired.

Our first care was to bury the body of this unfortunate man. I then lost no time in selling the rich merchandise with which his ship was laden; and this done, I richly rewarded the sage Akmar—engaged a crew—and set sail to return to my native country.

My neighbours were amazed when I came back so soon with such great riches, and spent a great deal of time and ingenuity in guessing how I had come by them, but without hitting upon the truth. They

thought I must have managed to find the Valley of Diamonds mentioned by the celebrated traveller Sindbad. I let them think so—it pleased them ; and from that time, all the young people of Ahmeira had, no sooner attained their eighteenth year, than they must needs set off running about the world in search of a fortune like mine. But the world is vast—the sea is deep—treasures are rare ; and if I see any of my young countrymen setting out on long voyages with their heads full of eager hopes and brilliant ideas, I always say to them, “ My friends, if you are lucky enough to come upon some treasure, thank Heaven for it, and profit by it ; but, believe me, the surest and most precious treasure is courage and perseverance. By the aid of these everything else is to be acquired.”



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THE HAUNTED CHAMBER.

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THE HAUNTED CHAMBER.

ABOUT the middle of last century, at the close of what had been a fine summer day, a gentleman of military appearance, mounted on a noble war-horse, and with one or two attendants riding behind him, was winding his way through the rich and pleasing scenery of Lorraine. Colonel de Lambert was the commander of a cavalry regiment in the French army, and had been engaged but a short time before at the battle of Grossbach, where, in fact, he had been severely wounded. Having obtained sick-leave, he was now on the way to his chateau, where he hoped speedily to recruit his strength. As he had been travelling for some time,

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and the clouds were beginning to be rather threatening, he was looking for some inn where he might pass the night. Some drops of rain were falling—not many as yet—but evidently there was a deluge at hand; and the roads of that period were not pleasant to travel on—certainly far from it—on a dark night amid torrents of rain. It was therefore with great delight that he and his companions, on arriving at the top of a hill, discovered at the foot what appeared to be a snug little inn. At that very moment the storm burst forth with considerable violence, and it was amidst wind and rain that they rode briskly down the hill, and pulled up at the inn door. Their arrival brought out the landlady.

“Can you accommodate us, my good woman?” asked the Colonel. “I must have lodging for myself, my men here, and my horses.”

“Well, sir,” said she, “you have come at rather an unfortunate time. The inn is very full—in fact, every room is taken. The men and the horses might be put up; but as for you, sir”—here she gave an admiring glance at the Colonel, and hesitated.

"I can't remain out here, that is certain," said he. "See how it rains; I am drenched already. You really must find some hole or corner for me."

The landlady still hesitatingly stood smoothing out her apron, and looking rather awkward. At last, raising her eyes, she said—

"There is one good room which you might have, sir; but"—

"But what? Give me this room at once, and send supper up to it as soon as you possibly can," cried the impatient Colonel.

"There is—there is—I don't know how to express myself; but"—

"Out with it, and be quick; I cannot stand longer."

"Ah! well, sir, you must know that on this spot there once stood an old chateau, and, indeed, a tower which formed a part of it is still standing, just at the back of the inn. Now the room of which I speak is in the tower. The room is a very good one, but people say it is haunted."

"Foolish woman!" cried the Colonel. "Do you think that I believe in ghosts?"

Still the landlady was sure that some mischief would follow if the gentleman went to this room.

"So gallant a gentleman, too!" she muttered.

"Show me the room at once," said he. "I don't believe in, and therefore don't fear, ghosts; and as for men, why I have my sword and two pistols which never miss fire, so woe betide any one who dares to enter this room without my permission. Show me the room, I say."

"Oh, sir, I dare not."

"Do as I command you, and be quick about it."

She took a candlestick, and was about to lead the way, when, eager to lay hold of any excuse which might put off the dreaded moment, she called out—

"I must get another candlestick for you, sir. If you will just go along that corridor, I shall follow immediately."

"Is it at the end of the corridor, then?"

"Oh! dear, no, sir. We would soon leave the house if the ghosts were so near us as all that. You open the door at the end of the passage—go down

some few steps along an underground passage—go up again some steps—open a door—go up another stair—take to your right—descend—then ”——

“ Ah ! my good woman,” interrupted the Colonel, laughing, “ how can you expect me to make out all that ? Come, go before me and show me the way.”

“ Oh ! dear, sir, I dare not.”

“ Not even with me by your side ? ”

“ Yes ; but then I must return alone. I dare not do it, sir. I am only a woman.”

“ Here, Joseph — James, come here,” said the Colonel, “ and escort a lady who is afraid of ghosts.”

“ Don’t joke about them, sir,” said the landlady, in a very grave tone.

The Colonel’s servants, in the meantime, had hastened to the spot on hearing him call out their names. Obeying his orders, they took up their positions, one on each side of the hostess, who, somewhat comforted by the bold appearance of this body-guard, at last made up her mind to go with the Colonel and show him the way. She led him along

a number of passages, up and down stairs, and at length ushered him into a very handsome chamber. There was evidence, however, of its not having been used for some time; dust lay upon the furniture, while that musty smell which one is sensible of in coming into a disused room was very perceptible. The conduct of the landlady exhibited great fear; she hardly looked around her, and her candlestick trembled in her hand. She probably would have fainted had she been compelled to go back again to the inn alone. The Colonel raised his candlestick, and went round the room, examining everything it contained with a careful eye. It was hung with tapestry, and the depth of the recesses in which the windows were situated showed the thickness of the walls. The bed stood in the centre of the room—a large and heavy-looking piece of furniture, but not uninviting to a weary man.

“Bring me my supper. I shall require sheets, too. I may as well have a fresh candle, as this one won’t last long. And you, John, see to my pistols; look to the priming.”

His servants went off to obey his orders; the hostess went with them, but she took care not to return with them, when, a few minutes afterwards, they brought what he had ordered.

"Our hostess has not come back, Joseph," said the Colonel to his servant. "I wish she had, for I should have liked her to tell me the history of this tapestry."

"Ah! sir," said the servant, with a grin, "she was a little too frightened to do that; she had had quite enough of it. She told us that, when she came along the passages and up these stairs, she heard the ghosts whispering into her ears all kinds of threats, and she quite expected to be killed by them on entering this room."

"Foolish woman!" said his master, with a smile. "Bring me my supper, Joseph; and you, James, light the fresh candle and make my bed. Open the windows, too, for this musty smell is enough to choke one."

It was with difficulty that the windows could be opened, shut as they had probably been for years.

robbers might lurk and hide their spoils ; and I have no idea of being killed in my bed like a rat in a trap."

After he had assured himself, both by his eyes and his hands, that there was no entrance of any description to the room save that by which he had himself come, and which was now secured by a door that might have withstood a siege, he sat down before the fire in a large easy-chair, and tried to read. In this attempt, however, he was not very successful, as sleep was slowly overcoming him, and he soon began to prepare for bed. He undressed, extinguished the candles, and jumped into bed, where he was not long of falling asleep. The first stroke of a clock awoke him. He counted as the clock slowly and solemnly told the hour : it was midnight.

"I have yet some hours of sleep before me," he said.

The words were hardly uttered, when a strange sound made him open his sleepy eyes. At first he could not imagine what caused it, but his ears soon recognised the sound of clanking metal, while he

thought, as he listened, that he could also make out footsteps, regular and slow. He sat up in bed, laid hold of his pistols, and was ready for whatever might happen. The noise increased. He could no longer doubt that some one was approaching him. The fire at that moment blazed up brightly, and he could see distinctly in the direction of the door, upon which he fixed his eyes. But a light, far brighter than that of the fire, and coming from the opposite corner of the room, made him turn round his head. What was his horror to see the wall opened, and standing at what appeared the top of a winding stair, a tall man clothed in armour, and holding in his hand a lantern. The figure entered the room, and coming towards the bed, stopped when about three paces from it, and fixing his eyes on the astonished Colonel, said, in hollow tones—

“Who are you who have had the courage to venture into my presence?”

“I come,” said De Lambert, “of a race which knows not fear. If you are a man, I do not fear you, seeing that I have my pistols and my sword here;

and God will protect me, if you are a spirit. You must know that it is for no evil purpose that I am here to-night."

"Your courage pleases me," said the strange visitor. "Your arms can be of little service to you against me, but your faith will protect you."

"You would not be the first to fall by my sword or pistol," said the Colonel, who was not over well pleased at the contempt expressed for his weapons.

"Try them," said the stranger. "I am within reach, and will allow you a fair shot. Fire, and display your skill."

"I do not wish to fire on a man who is alone and unarmed."

In answer to this, the stranger, drawing from its sheath at his side a long sword, advanced still nearer the Colonel, and directing it towards him, soon made him feel the point against his shoulder.

At this the Colonel's chivalry gave way; such generosity would now be absurd, so he raised the loaded pistol, and fired. The ball went right through the body of the stranger, and lodged in the wall

opposite. He did not fall to the ground; he only smiled; and the Colonel felt the point of the long sword touching his flesh more closely.

Not a moment was to be lost. He fired his second pistol. The ball again passed through his visitor, and flattened against the wall. He did not stir, but his smile now changed into a laugh, and the long sword penetrated still deeper into the flesh of the unfortunate Colonel. The latter, in desperation, laid hold of his sword, and made many cuts at the stranger, attacking his breast, heart, and head, plunging it up to the hilt, but without producing any effect. Still that laughter!

"I must give it up," said the Colonel, out of breath with his exertion. "I see that you must be a spirit, against whom my hand and my sword are equally powerless. What do you desire of me? Speak!"

"Will you obey me?"

"Yes, if your commands are not contrary to the laws of God."

"Will you venture to disobey me? Do you not fear my wrath?"

"I fear only the displeasure of Heaven," said the pious Colonel.

"I could kill you"——

"Do so. If Heaven has given you power over my body, you have none over my soul, which I commit to its keeping."

Here the Colonel closed his eyes, and grasped a miniature of his wife, which hung around his neck, and which he never failed to press to his bosom whenever exposed to danger or temptation. But now no longer feeling the sword pressed against his breast, he opened his eyes, and, with some little surprise, beheld the stranger, his arms crossed, regarding him with a pleasant smile.

"You are truly brave," said he,— "a good soldier! I wish to reward your courage by giving you possession of treasures belonging to me, and of which no one knows the hiding-place. Follow me. Will you venture to do so?"

The Colonel, without saying a word, jumped from his bed, and put on his clothes. The stranger, still smiling, said to him——

"You had better take your sword,—this sword which is stained with the blood of France's enemies. Now follow me. Don't look back,—pay no attention to what is said to you ; if any dangers threaten you, make the sign of the cross, but don't speak. Come !"

And then directing him to the hole in the wall, he began to descend the stair, which kept constantly winding and going down, down into the depths of the earth. The Colonel followed closely behind, without looking back, and without giving any answer to the words which on every side he heard whispered into his ear.

"Take care," said a soft voice ; "it is a fiend you are following."

"Go back," cried another ; "he takes you to the lower regions, from whence you will never return."

"Do not listen," said a feeble voice, "to what your guide tells you ; he only wants you to sell your soul for the treasure he is to give you."

He saw flaming swords pointed at him, and sometimes hideous faces loomed out of the darkness ; but

the sign of the cross had the effect of dispelling these visions. On and on they went—always descending—for the space of nearly an hour. At length they entered a large hall paved entirely with black stones of an equal size, each having in its centre an iron ring, and in every respect they were alike.

The stranger passed over a number of them, and at last stopped before one.

“Here is the stone which covers my treasures,” said he; “under it there is much gold and silver, besides many jewels,—enough to form the fortune of a king. The jewels are of a kind far more beautiful than any now seen by men. All this treasure I give you; but you must not attempt to raise the stone which covers it one minute before two o’clock; and take care that you raise the right stone, for under every one lie hid the treasures of other families, guarded by the spirits of their former possessors. If any of these spirits but touches you, you are a dead man. But to distinguish this stone from the others, and to carry away what you find, it is necessary that you should”——

At that moment two o'clock struck ; the vast hall shook as with thunder ; there was a rushing sound as if of wind, and the Colonel was left alone. His attention had been so distracted, that when he again turned towards the stone, he was unable to discover to which the stranger had pointed. The Colonel was, as may be supposed, not a little annoyed at this, but tried to make the best of it.

"It cannot be helped," thought he. "Even although I do make a mistake, and lift the wrong stone, I dare say nothing very terrible will happen. Perhaps my strange friend only invented this story to prevent me obtaining even greater treasures than those which he promised me."

Having made this very ungrateful reflection, he set about his work, and began to lift the stone at his right hand. He raised it partially, but being frightened by the strange sound which came from beneath it, he in some haste dropped it again into its place. Again he tried another stone, but on this occasion there was not only a similar noise, but a long, skinny arm, with clenched hand, shot up out of the hole, and

it was with difficulty that the Colonel got the stone replaced. This frightened him not a little, and it was some time before he resumed his labours. He did so, however, trying now in another direction. But the fiend who dwelt beneath this third stone was a little too quick for him, for he shot up out of the hole in an instant, and stood displayed in all his horrors before the Colonel. He had up to this time displayed the courage worthy of his profession and of his race, but now he was thoroughly unnerved. He did not stop to inspect the appearance of his new visitor. Seizing his lamp, he rushed along the hall, and up the stair. He knew the fiend was behind him; he heard his steps, and thought he was gaining upon him. Up the winding steps he flew, always just one turn of the stair in front of his pursuer, and struggling hard to keep that advantage. Would the stair never come to an end? were its windings endless? He thought so that night, as, breathless and exhausted, he hastened up it. To make matters worse, he had dropped his candlestick, and now was in total darkness. At last a glimmer of light,—the

highest step gained,—his foot on the threshold of the room,—with one bound he entered, slamming the door in the face of the fiend, and made for his bed.

“Thank Heaven, I am safe!” said he, jumping into bed.

“Are you?” said an appalling voice.

The fiend was not only in the room with him, but in his bed; and the horrid skinny fingers were making for his throat. He made a desperate struggle; there was a loud crash, and—he awoke, to see a huge black cat making for the open window, and the handsome jug which had contained his wine, and had been standing by his bedside on a small table, lying smashed to atoms on the floor.

A bright summer sun was shining into the room, lighting up the gloomy tapestry. So all this was a dream; and the door in the wall, the knight in armour, the stones to be lifted, and the fiend who had chased him, were but the results of the supper he had taken. As soon as he saw clearly what had happened, he could not help laughing to himself. He

laughed the more as he thought how horrified his landlady would be.

"I will tell her that the spirits have done this mischief. She will be disappointed if I have no midnight adventure to report. What a reputation for courage I shall gain! Ha! ha!"

The landlady entered the room with his servants shortly afterwards.

"How have you slept, sir?" said she, with some anxiety.

"Not badly,—not badly, my good woman. I have been a little annoyed by the spirits, and they have actually broken the wine-jug."

"So they have—my handsome china jug! Ah! sir, I knew they would do some mischief. I am glad it is no more; but it was a costly article, and quite new."

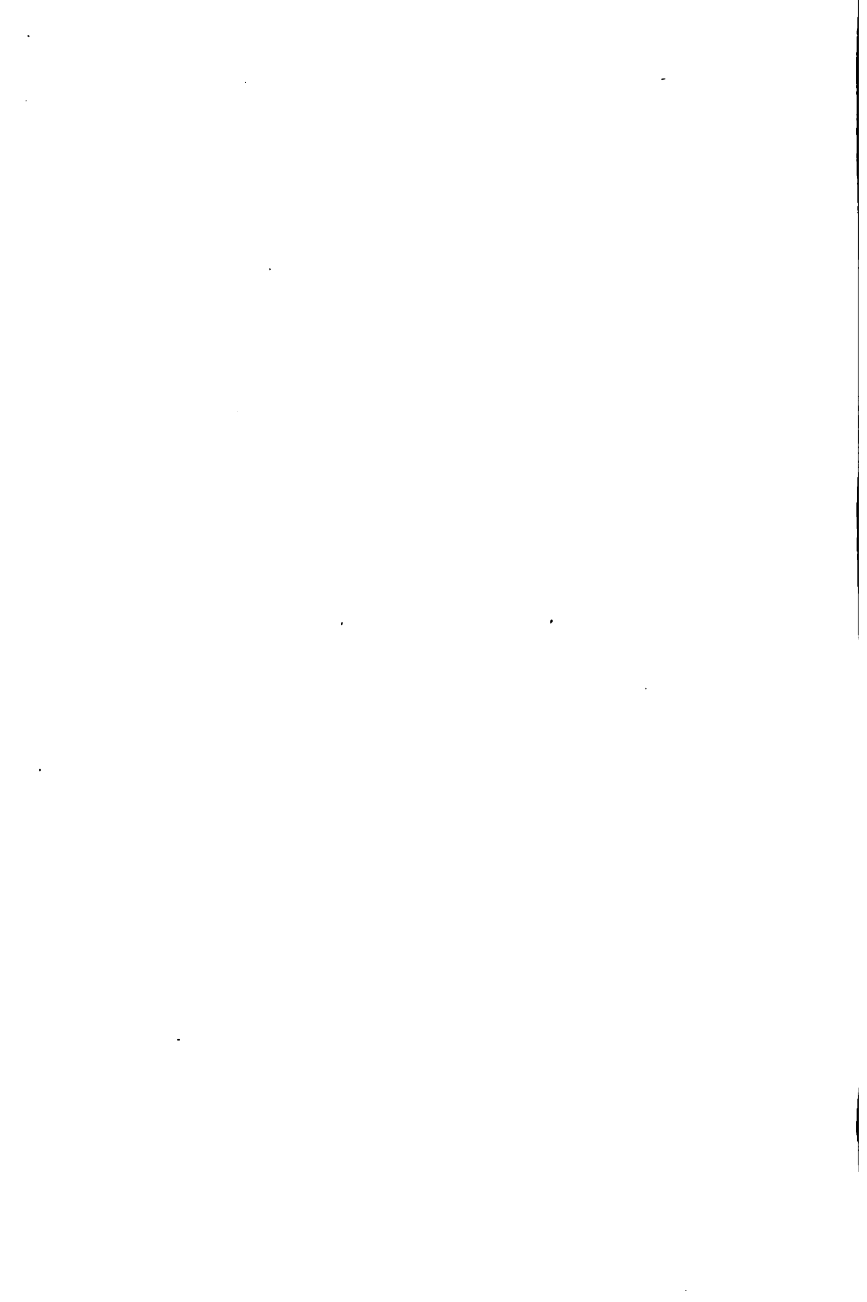
"I shall repay the loss, with interest too. It was through my obstinacy in coming here that the jug has been broken."

The Colonel paid well for the jug and for his lodging, and bade adieu to the landlady, who was

more convinced than ever as to the existence of ghosts in this old room. When afterwards foolhardy guests would express their doubts on this subject, she would quote the adventure of Colonel de Lambert in the Haunted Chamber.



THE BEARDLESS HERO.





THE BEARDLESS HERO.

IN the war of 1812, there was in the ninth regiment of the line a little drummer boy, only ten years old. He was the orphan child of a soldier named Frolut, but he generally went among the men by the name of Bilboquet, or Cup-and-ball, which sobriquet he owed to his long, thin body, surmounted by such a large head that he really resembled the plaything so called. Young Frolut, or Bilboquet, whichever you please, was not, however, remarkable for anything but the singularity of his appearance. The drum-major's cane had so often beaten time on his shoulders, that some idea of harmony had at length got into his head and hands, but

this was all. He did not know how to cock his forage-cap knowingly over his right ear, as the youngest of his comrades did; he could not swagger along jauntily like his superiors; and one day, when he tried to let his little sword hang gracefully between his legs, in the fashion of the dandies of the regiment, it tripped him up, and the poor boy fell down and skinned his nose, to the great amusement of the spectators. Every one made fun of him, which wasn't fair, for he never made fun of anybody; and perhaps this was the reason that he avoided the company of his equals whenever he could, and was much fonder of being alone than are most boys at his age. This was only natural. He often tried to share in the amusements of the others, but he never could succeed in anything, and was always being teased and bullied. If they played at the *drogue*—a game in which a forked stick is placed upon the nose of the loser by way of penalty—whether it was owing to the mischievousness of the other drummers, or because Bilboquet really had a nose like a potato, the *drogue* always pinched him so dreadfully that

the tears came into his eyes. Then, if he were playing at hot cockles, instead of striking him with their hands—and some of the hands of these grenadiers were as large as battledores—according to the rule of the game, the others armed themselves with belts, sometimes without removing the buckles; and there were even some who used shoes with great nails in them to hit poor Bilboquet. Then he would get up furious, crying with rage and pain, and would accuse everybody, but could never find out who had done it. And when they were tired of beating his hands black and blue, they would run after him, calling him muff and coward. Next day he had to go to drill as usual, and as his hands were still bruised, his drumming was by no means perfect, and the drum-major's cane would come to teach him the time. So you see Bilboquet had no great reason to talk about the pleasures of a military life, and, as I said before, he was very quiet and uncommunicative, and kept very much to himself.

The story which I am going to relate took place in the famous campaign of Russia. One day—it was

the 12th of July 1812—Frolut's regiment was stationed on the banks of the Dwina, when an order arrived from the Emperor to carry a position on the other side of an enormous ravine. This position was defended by a battery of six pieces of cannon, which mowed down the soldiers by whole ranks at a time; but, to carry out the plans of the Emperor, it was necessary to carry this battery, and an aide-de-camp rode up at full gallop with an order for the two light companies of the ninth regiment to advance. It was a daring attempt, and it was evident that more than three-fourths of those engaged in it would never return. So the light infantry, brave as they were, looked at each other with doubtful shakes of the head and shrugs of the shoulders. Some veterans might even be heard muttering, as they pointed to the cannon, "Does the General think that these fellows spit out nothing but baked apples?" or, "Does he wish the Cossacks to make mince-meat of us, that hesendstwo hundred men against such a redoubt?"

"Soldiers, it is the order of the Emperor," cried the aide-de-camp, and galloped off.

"Why didn't you say so at once then?" said an old sergeant, fixing his bayonet. "Come along. We musn't keep the Little Corporal waiting. When he tells you to go and get killed, he doesn't like you to lose any time about it."

The "Little Corporal" was the affectionate nickname by which Napoleon was known among his soldiers.

There was still some hesitation, however, and already the captain who was to command the storming party had twice given the order to the drum-major to advance and beat the charge. He remained leaning on his great cane, shaking his head, and seeming by no means disposed to obey. All the while Bilboquet, sitting astride his drum, was quietly whistling an air and beating time with his fingers. A third time the order was given to the drum-major. He still seemed unwilling to obey, when suddenly Bilboquet jumped up, slung his drum across his shoulder, seized his drumsticks, and passing under the nose of the drum-major, eyed him proudly from head to foot, and with one word repaid him for all his harshness.

"Come on, you great coward!" he cried.

The drum-major was going to raise his cane, but already Bilboquet was at the head of the two companies, and was beating the charge like a madman. The soldiers advanced after him, and ran towards the terrible battery. Its six guns were discharged at the same instant, and whole ranks of the brave men fell never to rise again. The rest were enveloped by the smoke, and deafened by the thunder of the cannon. Then the smoke cleared away, the noise ceased an instant, and twenty paces in front of them they saw the dauntless Bilboquet, unhurt, and beating away at his drum as if to defy the great cannon with its feeble rattle. The light infantry rushed on, and still in front of them there was the drummer, summoning them forward with his rub-a-dub-dub. Again the cannon fired, and a volley of grape-shot tore through the shattered remnants of two fine companies. At this moment Bilboquet turned and saw that there were scarcely fifty men left of the two hundred, and, as if seized by fury, he redoubled his noise—it seemed as if there were twenty drummers beating at once.

The soldiers took fresh courage, and rushed forward once more. In a minute they entered the battery, Bilboquet at their head.

"Don't run away!" he cried to the retreating Russians. "Do wait for us a moment."

Napoleon himself had been a spectator of this gallant deed. At each volley he shook with agitation upon his horse; and when the soldiers entered the battery, he lowered his glass, and exclaimed in a low tone, "Brave fellows!"

Immediately one of the Emperor's aides-de-camp was sent to the battery, and came galloping back.

"How many of them are alive?" said Napoleon.

"Forty," replied the aide-de-camp.

"Have forty crosses of the Legion of Honour ready to-morrow," said the Emperor, turning towards one of his generals.

And in fact all the regiment next day formed a circle round the remnant of the two light companies, and one by one the names of the forty brave men who had taken the battery were read out, and each

was presented with the badge of honour so much coveted by every French soldier.

The ceremony was over, and every one was moving away, when a voice came from the ranks, crying out, in a tone of surprise—

“And me! me! Am I to have nothing?”

General B——, who was distributing the crosses, turned and saw before him our young friend Bilboquet, his cheeks red, and his eyes filled with tears.

“You, little fellow!” he said; “what do you want?”

“Well, General, I was there,” said Bilboquet, almost in a passion. “I beat the charge in front of them all. I was the first who entered the battery.”

“Well, it can’t be helped, my boy; you have been forgotten,” replied the General. “Besides,” he added, “you are only a boy. You shall have the cross when you have a beard on your chin; in the meanwhile, here is something to console yourself with.”

So saying, the General held out a twenty-franc piece to poor Bilboquet, who looked at it without seeming to care about taking it. Every one was

silent and looked at him ; he remained motionless before the General, and great tears gathered in his eyes. Even those who used to tease him were touched by compassion for him in his disappointment, and were perhaps going to raise a cry in support of his claim, when he suddenly raised his head, as if he had just taken a great resolution, and said to the General—

“Very well ; let me have it. It will do for another time.”

And without more ado, he put the coin in his pocket, and turned away whistling, as if he were quite content.

From that day no one laughed at little Bilboquet. But he did not become for all that any more sociable. On the contrary, he seemed to be turning over some great idea in his head, and instead of treating his comrades, as they had expected, he carefully preserved the twenty francs which he had received from the General.

Some time afterwards the French soldiers entered Smolensk, victorious and full of ardour. Bilboquet

was among them, and the very day of his arrival he went to walk through the town. He appeared to take a great interest in all the faces that he met, looking at them with a smiling air, and seeming to examine them with the critical air of a buyer who is choosing goods. I ought to say, however, that he only took notice of those who were ornamented by large beards. There were plenty long and thick ones to be seen, but all of such an ugly red colour, that, after a moment's examination, Bilboquet turned his head and went on. At length, in the course of his promenade, our drummer arrived at the quarter of the city inhabited by the Jews. The Jews at Smolensk, as throughout the whole of Russia and Poland, live in a separate part of the city, and have all kinds of articles for sale. As soon as Bilboquet had entered their quarter, he was delighted. Here were the most splendid beards in the world, black as ebony ; for the Jewish people, dispersed as it has been among other nations, has yet preserved the brown tint of its skin, and the brilliant black of its hair. So our friend Bilboquet was enchanted. Having made up his

mind, he entered a little shop, the master of which had a magnificent beard. The shopkeeper approached our drummer, and humbly said to him in bad French—

“What can I do for you, my little sir?”

“I want your beard,” replied Bilboquet, haughtily.

“My beard!” said the shopkeeper, in astonishment. “You are making fun of me.”

“I tell you, fellow, that I wish to have your beard,” persisted the proud conqueror, laying his hand on his sword. “But don’t be afraid that I am going to steal it from you. Look! here’s a Napoleon—give me the change.”

The man wished to make little Bilboquet listen to reason, but he was as persistent as a blind horse, and a dispute arose, which was not long in drawing the attention of a number of the French soldiers. They came into the shop to find out what all the row was about, and thought Bilboquet’s idea so amusing, that they obliged the Jew to give up his beard, and one of them, the buffoon and barber of his regiment, drew out his razors, and proceeded to shave the unhappy

tradesman without either soap or water. Then, after having roughly despoiled him of his beard, he handed it over to Bilboquet, who bore it away in triumph.

When he arrived at the quarters of his regiment, he got the tailor to sew it on a piece of ass-skin from a broken drum, and without mentioning his plan to any one, he put it away at the bottom of his knapsack. The others wondered what he meant to do, but there were more serious things to think about. The march was resumed, and when the army arrived at Moscow, nobody was troubling himself about little Bilboquet's odd fancy.

Then dreadful misfortunes happened. Cold and devastation deprived the French army of all its resources; famine attacked it, and soon it was necessary to retreat over an almost desert country and endless fields of snow. I am not going to describe this horrible disaster—it is a thing at once too great and too dreadful to be treated of in such a story as this; enough to say that each one returned as best he could, and that only a few regiments continued to keep by their colours and obey the orders of their

officers. Bilboquet's was one of these. It had formed part of the rear-guard, the duty of which was to prevent the thousands of Cossacks who followed the army from massacring unhappy soldiers separated from their comrades.

One day they crossed a small river, and, to delay the pursuit of the enemy, they were trying to blow up two arches of the wooden bridge over which they had just passed ; but the powder had been so hastily laid, that the explosion did not produce the desired effect. The arches were considerably shattered, but all the framing remained, supported by a single beam, so that, when the enemy arrived, it would not take them long to make the bridge once more secure.

The General in command, seeing that the safety of a part of his army depended on the destruction of the bridge, wished to send some sappers to bring down this beam, and with it the rest of the wood-work ; but just as they were hastening to get into a boat, the enemy appeared on the other bank of the river, and commenced such a vigorous fire of mus-

ketry that no sapper seemed likely to reach the fatal beam alive.

The ranks began to fall back, when all of a sudden a soldier was seen to spring into the river, with an axe on his shoulder. He plunged into the water and appeared again, and by his beard he was recognised as a sapper. With eager eyes all the regiment watched this man, who had so nobly devoted himself for their safety. He was swimming onwards; the enemy made the water bubble round him with a hail of balls; but the brave sapper did not pause for an instant. At length he reached the wreck of the bridge, gained a footing upon it, and with a few strokes of the axe cut through the remaining beam, already almost destroyed. Immediately the woodwork of the two arches gave way, and fell, crashing and splashing, into the water. Amid the ruins the brave sapper disappeared for a moment, but presently he was seen swimming towards the bank, apparently unhurt. The whole regiment rushed forward in an outburst of joy and admiration, for even among daily scenes of horror noble actions have still power to

move our hearts. The soldiers on the other side ceased firing, struck by the gallantry of the swimmer. Poles were held out to him as he neared the land. A hundred voices cheered him, and urged him on. The General himself came down to the bank, and was not a little surprised to see emerge from the water no less a personage than our friend Bilboquet, with a long black beard fastened to his chin.

“What’s this?” he cried. “What is the meaning of this extraordinary get-up?”

“It’s me—Bilboquet. You said you would give me the cross when I had a beard on my chin, and I think this is a capital one. I have had plenty of trouble to get it, I can tell you, and it cost me every penny of your twenty francs.”

The General was amazed at the courage and acuteness of the boy. He shook hands with Bilboquet as if he had been a man, and gave him on the spot the cross which he himself wore at his button-hole, and which he had gained by his bravery and long services. Many an older soldier envied the boy such an

honour, but no one grudged it. From that time the veterans of the regiment treated Bilboquet like a friend, and the drum-major's cane and his shoulders had no further acquaintance.



LITTLE MOUCK.



LITTLE MOUCK.

THERE once lived in the town of Nicea a strange person who was called Little Mouck. It would be difficult to say whether the form and features or the dress of this individual were the oddest part of him. He was not more than three feet and a half high ; but his head was so enormous that it seemed to be crushing his insignificant body to the earth, like a gigantic dome supported on a frail colonnade ; or, to use a less ambitious metaphor, like a pumpkin placed on the top of a walking-stick. The costume which he generally wore did not make his appearance less ridiculous. His clothes were always much too wide for him, and he was

especially distinguished by a pair of slippers about half a yard long, which were the laughing-stock of all the boys in the town. Not that they often caught sight of these articles, for Little Mouck kept closely within doors, only stirring out once a month or so, and in other respects his habits were as eccentric as his appearance.

Little Mouck was the son of Mouckrah, a distinguished man of learning, and held in great respect in the town, though but little favoured by the gifts of fortune. He had lived in almost as retired a way as his son. Unfortunately he did not love this child ; his dwarfish stature made the father ashamed of him, and his mind seemed suited to his body. When Little Mouck had already reached his sixteenth year, he still played with toys like a baby ; and Mouckrah, a very grave and serious man, was constantly scolding him for his silliness and childishness, without, however, thinking it necessary to do anything for the poor boy's education.

One day old Mouckrah fell and broke his leg. Fever attacked him ; he lingered some time, then

died, leaving behind him only Little Mouck, poor, and, what was worse, ignorant, which means that he was quite incapable of providing for his wants.

Plunged all his life in scientific studies and reflections, Mouckrah had never taken much care of his fortune, and, without knowing it, he was not possessed of a penny at the moment of his death. As soon as the funeral was over, some hard-hearted relations, who had once *obliged* him with a loan at high interest, presented themselves at the house, seized all the property, and turned out Little Mouck, but not without giving him some cheap advice.

"Go! my boy," they said to him; "travel through the world; stir yourself, and you will make your fortune."

Mouck had never been taught anything, and his simplicity surpassed all belief; but he was possessed of a certain amount of natural penetration, which made him understand that supplications would be useless; under the cousin he smelt the creditor.

"Very well," he said, "I will set out; but at least let me take my father's clothes."

The wardrobe of the deceased was not sumptuous, and they hastened to present it to his son, at the same time taking care to boast of the magnificence of the gift.

Old Mouckrah was tall and sturdy, so his clothes fitted badly enough the dwarfish body of his son; but the little fellow soon found an expedient. Having cut away all that exceeded his length, he donned the paternal garments, without troubling himself by doing anything to reduce the width of them. Hence the strange costume in which he was always seen dressed from that day to the end of his life. Having said farewell to his kind relations, Little Mouck planted his father's old sword in his girdle, to make people respect him, and, with a stick in his hand, set off into the world.

He walked along merrily all the first part of the day, for, as he had come to seek his fortune, he had no doubt but that he was about to fall in with it. So reasoned the simple Mouck, from whom no delusions had as yet been removed by the rude experience of life. If he saw in the dust some wretched

piece of glass glittering in a ray of the sun, he carefully picked it up, and thought he had a fine diamond ; a piece of brass he took for a nugget of gold ; and when in the distance he caught sight of the shining cupolas of a mosque or the blue waves of the sea, he leapt for joy, believing himself at the gates of some enchanted land. But alas ! as he advanced, these deceitful images lost all their splendour, and poor Mouck recognised soon, by the weariness which spread over his little legs, and, above all, by the murmurs of his stomach, that he had not yet entered into the paradise of which he dreamed.

He travelled thus for two days, weary and hungry, having no food but some sour berries, and no pillow but the hard and cold earth ; and he was beginning to feel down-hearted, and to be in doubt about his fortune, when, coming to the top of a high hill, he saw shining in the morning sun the buildings of a large city. The crescent floated gaily and proudly above glittering cupolas, and it seemed to Little Mouck that the coloured flags invited him to enter. He stood and reflected for an instant.

"Yes," he said to himself at length, "it is here that Mouck is to find his fortune." And in spite of his fatigue, he bounded joyously, and cried as loud as could, "Yes, yes! here or nowhere!"

He collected all his remaining strength, and made for the city; but though it seemed so near, he was not able to reach it till towards mid-day, for his little legs almost refused to move. At length he entered the gates. Then you might have seen him arranging the folds of his mantle, adjusting his turban, stretching out his girdle over his little stomach, and hanging his long dagger in a more martial style, to give the citizens a good idea of him.

But he might have saved himself all this trouble, for nobody seemed to take any notice of him. He traversed many streets, passed through a dozen squares, tramped over miles of pavement, without a door being opened to him. Nowhere did any one come out, as he had expected, and say—

"Little Mouck, are you tired? Little Mouck, are you hungry? Come here, Little Mouck, and eat and drink, and rest your little legs."

He had stopped at length before a large and handsome mansion, which he was regarding with the melancholy that an empty stomach naturally inspires, when at one of the windows appeared an old woman, who began to sing this strange song—

Oh !

Small

People all !

Come, come away !

My dinner is to-day.

You are welcome, as you know ;

And the feast is waiting, as I say.

The soup is ready, the pudding is made ;

So

Come along, little ones, don't be afraid !

Plenty for all, as you will see.

The more of you, the better for me.

Quick ! or all will be done.

Come ! I turn away none.

We have just begun.

Every one !

Run !

Mouck was wondering to whom was addressed this pressing invitation, the first words of which had made

him prick up his ears, when suddenly the door opened, and an innumerable troop of dogs and cats ran up and entered the house.

At this sight the astonishment of Mouck was very great. He stood stock-still for some moments in sheer perplexity, hesitating whether or not he ought to respond to the eccentric invitation of the old woman, whose wrinkled face and strange costume had the effect of impressing him with a certain amount of terror. But at length, as his appetite kept increasing, he took courage, and crossed the threshold of the house. Before him trotted a pair of young cats; Mouck resolved to follow them, wisely guessing that they would lead him straight to the victuals.

But when he had arrived at the top of the staircase, he was stopped by the old woman of the window, who asked him, in a gruff tone, what he wanted.

"I heard you inviting everybody to dinner," replied Mouck; "and as I have been walking for three days, and am horribly hungry, I followed those that I saw entering your house."

The old woman laughed, and shook her head.

“But, you funny little fellow, didn’t you see who it was that I invited. Cats and dogs,—these are my friends. None of your men for me.”

“I am hungry,—I am very hungry,” repeated Mouck; “and then, madam, I am so little,—so little that I will scarcely eat more than a cat.”

The old woman allowed herself to be moved by this simple speech, and consented to let Mouck sit down between two great tom-cats, who rolled their large eyes upon him in a very inquisitive and uncivil manner, seeming to regard him as an intruder at their feast. Our little friend thought nothing of this at the time, being wholly occupied by the work set before him on his plate.

The old woman watched him as he ate, and was perhaps pleased by the gratitude which was expressed in his face, or the politeness with which he treated her four-footed guests. When he had made a good meal, she came up to him, and said—

“Little Mouck, would you like to enter my service? Not much to do, and plenty to eat; will that suit you?”

Mouck, who had highly approved of the cookery of the establishment, received this proposal with delight; and without hesitation engaged himself in the service of Madame Ahavzi—so the old woman was named.

The duty which was confided to him was light enough, but of a most extraordinary kind.

Besides the animals of the neighbourhood, for whom Madame Ahavzi kept open table on certain days, she kept of her own two cats and four catesses, which she took a great deal more care of than if they had been human beings. Mouck was specially attached to the service of these animals. Every morning he had to wash them, comb them, and anoint them with rich essences. If the mistress went out, Little Mouck had to watch over the cats, to preside at their repasts, and in the evening to put them comfortably to bed on silk cushions, and wrap them up in velvet coverings.

There were also in the house some little dogs put under Mouck's charge; but these did not require nearly so much attention as the cats, which were like

children of Madam Ahavzi. For the rest, Mouck led a life almost as solitary as at his father's. Except his mistress, he saw nobody but cats and dogs all day.

This kind of life suited him very well for some time. The cookery of the house was good, as we have seen; the work was not hard, and the old woman seemed for a time very well pleased with him. But this easy situation did not always remain so. The cats became difficult to manage. There is an art in managing cats, as in everything else; and poor Mouck, being ignorant of it, brought all sorts of troubles upon himself. When the old woman had gone out, they used to jump about the room like lunatics, playing, teasing, chasing each other, and upsetting all that came in their way. In this way it happened that they broke several ornaments of great value. But as soon as they heard the footsteps of their mistress on the staircase, they would run to crouch on their cushions, and lie basking in the firelight, with such a calm and lazy air, that Madam Ahavzi did not hesitate to regard Mouck as the sole

cause of the disorder which reigned in the apartment. It was no good for the little fellow to protest his innocence, and narrate the truth; the old lady put more faith in the demure and hypocritical looks of her cats than in the words of her servant, and one day threatened to chastise him soundly if he did not take better care of her four-footed guests. She was certainly a cross and tiresome old woman, who had no human kindness except for dogs and cats.

Tired and troubled by these continual scoldings, which it was not in his power to escape, Mouck resolved to leave the service of Madam Ahavzi. But as he had already had enough experience of travelling to know how hard it is to get on without money, he made all kinds of attempts to obtain the wages which his mistress had promised him, but which he was never able to persuade her to pay him.

There was in the house a mysterious chamber, which Madam Ahavzi kept always carefully closed, and in which Mouck sometimes heard a great noise going on. Thinking about his wages, it struck him one day that this must be the place where Madam

Ahavzi kept her treasures, and then he began to think how he might enter it, for he did not suppose it would be a crime to help himself to his due.

On a certain morning when Madam Ahavzi had gone out, one of the little dogs came up to Mouck, wagging its tail knowingly, and looking up into his face as if it had something to tell him. It was one which the old lady always treated rather ill, while Mouck had conciliated its favour by many good offices; so it was fond of the little fellow; and now, with an unusual display of affection, it was drawing him by his wide trousers, as if to invite him to follow. Mouck understood his dumb friend, and allowed himself to be conducted through the house till they arrived at the bedroom of the old lady. The dog gravely walked round this apartment, sniffing and scratching at the walls, and at length stopped before a panel of cedar, against which he reared himself, barking and looking hard at Mouck. The latter witnessed this proceeding with considerable astonishment, but presently it occurred to him to strike upon the panel, which gave back a hollow sound. It must be a door. But how

was he to open it? There was no trace of so much as a keyhole, and it did not yield to his efforts. The dog kept on barking, and began to jump up towards the figure of a dragon marked out in copper-headed nails upon the panel. Mouck could not imagine the meaning of this device, and was passing his hand over it, when suddenly one of the nails yielded to the unintentional pressure of his finger, and the panel springing open, discovered to Mouck's delighted eyes the very chamber that for a long time he had been so curious to visit.

The appearance of it was singularly strange, and indeed almost alarming. It was a perfect museum, in which lay confused all sorts of various objects; costumes of every country and every age, bottles, horns, bladders, stuffed birds, snakes, skeletons of men and animals, mirrors, and jars covered with cabalistic signs, cages, compasses, and all sorts of astronomical instruments; in fact, the whole machinery of magic.

Mouck was astonished. He went from one object to another, examining and touching everything with the curiosity of a child.

A magnificent vase of Bohemian crystal attracted his attention above all the other articles which littered the chamber. He turned it over and over in his hands without being able to cease admiring its beauty. Suddenly a noise was heard. Mouck started, and the vase, slipping from his hands, fell on the ground, sparkling and crashing like an explosion of fireworks, and was broken into a thousand pieces.

It was a false alarm, but the mischief it had caused was real enough. After such a misfortune, the only thing for the poor little fellow to do was to make off as fast as he could, if he wished to escape the hot anger and the heavy hand of the old lady.

His mind was made up at once. But not forgetting what had brought him to the mysterious chamber, he began to ferret about in every corner, hoping to find something which would be of use to him, and which would not be missed much by his mistress. Little Mouck did not rate his services very high, but he thought he was entitled to something to compensate him for all the trouble and scolding that his four-footed charges had occasioned him.

He knew that he had not much time to waste in searching, and presently his eye fell on an old pair of slippers of very antiquated fashion, the enormous size of which attracted him. They had apparently been originally made to fit some respectable giant, and two or three feet like Mouck's might easily have gone into each of them. This was exactly what made him take a fancy to these strange articles of dress. In such slippers he would look like a man, at length, and no one, thought he, would again be tempted to treat him as a child.

A pretty little walking-stick, with a carved lion's head at the top, seemed to him also a very unnecessary thing for Madam Ahavzi, while it might be of great use to him on his journey. He seized it accordingly, and, without pushing his search further, made his way out of the room, and out of the house, and out of the town, and ran without looking behind him as far as the top of the nearest hill.

When he had gone so far, he did not yet believe himself in safety, and went on running until he was quite out of breath.

In all his short life, Little Mouck had never run so far nor so fast, and yet, in spite of the fatigue which he suffered in every limb, he felt obliged to run on, and it seemed to him as if a supernatural power was dragging him forwards in spite of himself. Mouck was not without penetration, as we have seen, and he soon guessed that he was under the influence of some charm which must rest in his new shoes. So he began to cry as if he were speaking to a horse which has set out at a gallop, "Ho! ho! stop! Ho! wo! wo! Quietly, quietly!"

At this the slippers stopped at once, and Mouck fell exhausted on the earth, where he also fell fast asleep.

While he was sleeping heavily, worn out by the fatigue of his long and rapid journey, Madam Ahavzi's little dog appeared to him in a dream, and barked out what follows :—

"Dear Mouck, you only know part of the use to which your slippers can be turned. Know now that if, having put them on your feet, you turn three times on your heel, you will fly through the air, and can be

conveyed to whatever place you choose. Know also that the little stick is a magic wand, by means of which you can discover treasures hid in the earth; for wherever there is gold, it will of its own accord strike on the ground three times, and twice to mark the position of silver. Madam Ahavzi will not miss them, as she was ignorant of their magical properties. Make use of these talismans and be prosperous."

Such was Little Mouck's dream, and as soon as he awoke he was anxious to prove the strange power of his slippers, while waiting for an opportunity of trying that of his stick. Thrusting his feet, then, deep into the said slippers, he lifted one in the air, and began to turn on the other heel.

Whoever has tried to accomplish this feat three times running in shoes a great deal too large for him, must not be astonished if Mouck did not succeed at his first attempt, especially when it is remembered that his enormous head, leaning now to the right and now to the left, threw him off his balance. Several times he fell flat on his nose. But he did not allow himself to be discouraged, and tried again and

again, till at length he was successful. Like a top smartly spun, he turned right round three times, and wished to be transported to the nearest large town. At once he felt himself lifted high up into the air. His wonderful slippers walked over the clouds as if they had wings, and almost before Little Mouck knew what had happened, he found himself right in the middle of a large square, where rose the buildings of a magnificent royal palace.

Mouck, as we know, was in possession of two valuable talismans, but, till he fell in with a chance of using them, he must manage to live, and he had not a farthing in his pocket to buy anything to eat. A rod showing hidden treasures was all very well in its way, but still it would be necessary to come to a place where a treasure was hidden before making any use of it, and treasures are not hidden everywhere nor found every day. Flying slippers were very fine things also, but to fly nowhere for no purpose was no better than not flying at all, and certainly would not fill a man's stomach, even though it were such a little one as Mouck's.

While our friend was reflecting thus, one of the King's couriers entered the palace. The poor man had evidently just returned from a long and hurried journey; he was breathless, covered with dust, and quite worn out.

"Come now," said Mouck to himself, "here is the very thing for me. These men are well fed and well paid; I should like to be one of them. My slippers would easily enable me to surpass them all."

So he made straight for the palace, and asked to be taken to the steward of the royal household, to whom he offered his services as a messenger.

The steward burst out laughing as he looked on the little shrimp who made this proposal.

"*You* a messenger!" he said. "Why, you would be a month carrying every word of a message. His majesty requires couriers who can do a mile at least in a minute. You!"

"Yes, me! Mouck, son of Mouckrah, surnamed Little Mouck—who undertakes to run faster than the swiftest of his majesty's couriers."

The coolness of the dwarf imposed on the steward. He did not believe a word of what Mouck said. A fine idea, indeed, that such a little abortion could even keep up with celebrated runners, whose legs were like compasses, and who covered as much ground at every step as many men did in ten! But he supposed that the little fellow was some buffoon who might be able to amuse his majesty.

"Very well," he said, "I engage you. Go down to the kitchen and make them give you something to eat, and prepare to run a trial course before the eyes of the King himself. Go along! and if you have any regard for your life and limbs, see that you do as well as you have promised."

Mouck did not require to have this invitation repeated. He ran down the stairs, four at a time, under the guidance of a slave, who told the chief cook to give him whatever he wished. This exactly suited Mouck's ideas.

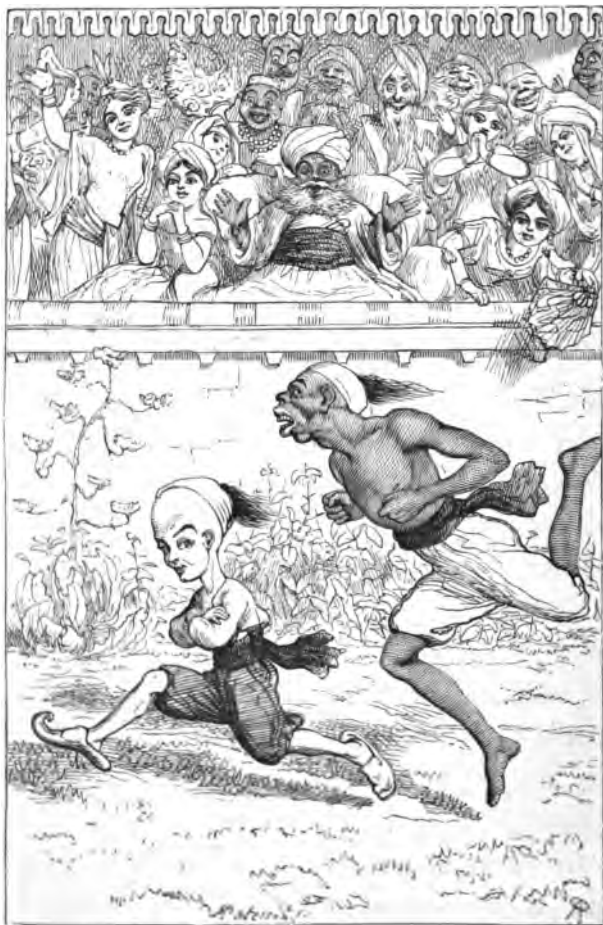
An hour afterwards, our hero, refreshed by his dinner, in good spirits, and in his big slippers, was led out upon a large meadow which stretched be-

neath the windows of the castle, and on which was to take place the trial of speed that the steward had mentioned to him.

Just at that time the court was in great want of amusements. Chinchilla, the King's favourite ape, had died of indigestion. His old cockatoo, named "the Rainbow," was moulting, and looked barer than a fowl on the spit. There were still, indeed, the gold fish, but staring at them had at length come to be very monotonous to his majesty. He received, then, with delight the steward's proposal to present before the court the spectacle of a foot-race in which a ridiculous dwarf undertook to beat the most active runner of the royal messengers.

When Mouck appeared on the scene, all the court was already at the windows, and it was amid a general explosion of laughter that they saw advance, with a most dignified air, a little body surmounted by an enormous head, which bent to the right and left to salute the assembly. But our friend did not allow himself to be put out by their merriment, and placing himself confidently by the side of





' Princess Amarza, the King's eldest daughter, waved her fan, and like two arrows shot at the same instant to the same mark, the two runners sped forth on the plain.'—STORIES FROM OVER THE SEA, page 173.

his competitor, thin and wiry as a greyhound, he awaited the signal agreed upon.

Princess Amarza, the King's eldest daughter, waved her fan, and like two arrows shot at the same instant to the same mark, the two runners sped forth on the plain.

At first Mouck's adversary took a decided lead ; but the former, carried along by his enchanted slippers, soon caught him up, and not only that, but passed him, and reached the goal long before the other, who at length arrived at it panting and breathing, while Mouck was as unruffled as if he had lounged slowly over the course.

The spectators remained for some moments silent from surprise and admiration ; they did not know what to make of this extraordinary feat. But when the King condescended to applaud, every one did the same, clapping hands, waving handkerchiefs, and crying out—

“ Hurrah for little Mouck ! Mouck for ever ! Mouck is the prince of runners ! ”

From that moment Mouck was attached to the

King's person in the capacity of courier ordinary and extraordinary ; and every day he gained more and more of his master's favour by the rapidity, intelligence, and fidelity with which he executed all the commissions that were intrusted to him. He was not such a fool after all, the little fellow, and his big head had more in it than might be supposed by those who only knew the simplicity and good-nature written on his countenance. But these qualities do not shield the smallest any more than the greatest of men from envy ; and the favour which Mouck enjoyed was not long of exciting against him the jealousy of the other servants, who took many opportunities of showing the poor little fellow their ill-will towards him.

This state of things made him very sad. Of an amiable nature himself, and wishing well to all the world, he could not bear the hatred, or even the coldness, of his companions.

"If I could only do them some service," he said to himself, "perhaps they would change their opinion of me."

Then he remembered his little stick, the magical

powers of which he had quite forgotten in his recent prosperity.

“I don’t care to find treasures for myself,” he thought. “The generosity of the King is enough for me. But if I were to chance upon some windfall, I might share it with my companions, and that would surely make them think better of me.”

Poor little Mouck! he was beginning to understand the weakness of human nature. From that time he never went out, either on pleasure or business, without being provided with his little stick, hoping that one day or other chance would lead him to some spot where treasures had been buried.

And, in fact, one morning, when he was walking alone in the most retired spot of the royal gardens, he felt his stick move three times in his hand. Full of joy, he drew out his dagger and cut marks on the trees round the place so as to know it again. This done, he returned to the palace.

When night came on, he took a spade and a dark lantern, and came to search for his treasure. There was more difficulty about this than he had foreseen,

for it is not enough to find a mine—you must dig and explore it. Now Mouck's arms were weak, and his spade big and heavy, and he had toiled more than three long hours before he had a hole of barely two feet deep. At length, however, he struck upon something hard, which gave a ringing sound as if of metal. Then he dug away with double diligence to uncover completely this object, of which only one side could as yet be perceived. Succeeding after great efforts, he saw lying before him an immense copper urn, sealed with lead. The next thing was to open it, and when this was at length accomplished, the lucky Mouck found it full to the brim of gold coins of all kinds, most of them bearing the date of the last reign.

The urn was too large and too heavy for him even to attempt to carry it. He contented himself for the meantime with stowing away into his belt and the pockets of his wide trousers as much gold as they could contain; he also disposed of some under his cloak, and, thus laden, he left the spot and regained his chamber, not without taking good care to re-

deposit the urn in the hole, and cover it up with turf, moss, and dry branches.

When the little fellow saw himself in possession of such a large sum, he believed that things were going to change for the better, and that all his ill-wishers would soon be turned into warm friends. Simple little Mouck ! you did not know much about human nature, if you imagined you could buy friends with money. You had much better have put on your slippers, loaded yourself with gold, and flown away as fast as you were able.

People had been jealous enough of him before, because of the high favour in which he stood with the King. Now they hated him, and accused him, and slandered him all the more, since he seemed suddenly to have grown rich, and gave away his gold with a generosity which procured him nothing but greater envy.

"He must be coining false money," said Azoli, the chief cook.

"He has robbed somebody," said Achmet, the master of the slaves.

"He has been stealing from the King," said his bitterest enemy, Archaz, the royal treasurer; and Archaz had good reason to say so, for he himself had been helping himself out of his master's coffers.

True or false, such accusations are but too often successful in ruining the person against whom they are made. Even if he escape unjust punishment, he is almost certain to lose the favour and prosperity which he may be deservedly enjoying. It was so in Mouck's case. His enemies were not content with hints and whispered slanders, but they concerted a plan for persuading the King that he was worthy of dismissal, or even death.

One day Korchaz, the head butler of the palace, presented himself in the royal chamber with a well-feigned appearance of dejection. The King at first took no notice of him, but Korchaz threw such an air of grief into his countenance and attitude, and sent forth such deep sighs, that at length his majesty asked what was the matter with him.

"Alas!" replied the rascal, humbly, "I am in

despair at having lost the favour of my royal and beneficent and incomparable master."

"My good fellow, what nonsense are you talking!" interrupted the King. "When has the sun of my favour ceased to shine upon you?"

The head butler fell on his face, and made a long and cunning speech, every sentence of which repeated the declaration of his own fidelity, and insinuated the dishonesty of the new favourite. "Mouck," said the butler, "was spending money right and left, with such profusion, that the royal purse must have been put at his disposal, unless," he added, "the wretched dwarf were coining false money or robbing his majesty; but in any case, it seemed right to his faithful subjects to make him aware of what was going on."

This story of Mouck's prodigality had the intended effect of rousing the King's suspicions, and he ordered the dwarf to be secretly and closely watched, so that, if possible, he might be caught in some act of dishonesty. The treasurer was delighted at this, and hoped to be able to make his own accounts straight at the expense of his fellow-servant. So he charged

himself with the duty of setting a watch on Mouck's proceedings.

In the meanwhile, the little fellow was quite unsuspecting; and that very evening, finding that his pockets were empty, he resolved to pay a visit to his treasure, and did so as soon as it was dark. He had just uncovered the hole, and was about to raise the coffer from its hiding-place, when his hand was seized in a grasp of iron, and a voice cried in his ears—

“Ah! I have caught you. Here is where you conceal your ill-gotten gains, is it?”

It was Archaz, followed by Azoli, Achmet, Korchaz, and all the rest of them.

Poor Mouck, surprised and confused, had not a word to say for himself, and before he could have said much, he was nearly strangled and dragged into the presence of the King.

His majesty, not at all well pleased at being roused out of his bed, received his late favourite with signs of great anger, and proceeded to dispose of his case on the spot. The vase, still half full of gold, was brought in, also the spade, cloak, and lantern of the

unfortunate prisoner ; then the treasurer told how they had surprised him in the very act of hiding this coffer in a retired corner of the garden.

“Not at all ! not at all !” cried Little Mouck, in full confidence of his innocence, and imagining that his mere word would convince every one of it. “You are quite mistaken. I was not burying this gold, but digging it up, after finding it by chance.”

Ironical sneers and murmurs of incredulity greeted the explanation of the dwarf, and its only effect on the King was to raise his anger to the highest pitch.

“What, wretch !” he cried, in a terrible voice ; “do you think you can deceive your King as well as rob him ? Even if your story were not evidently false, this gold, whether you found it or not, did not belong to you, and you had no right to dispose of it. But I have other proofs of your guilt, which must confound you. Archaz, my faithful treasurer, speak and say if you have not of late found large sums missing from the royal coffers, and if you have not had reason to suspect some one of robbing me.”

“Yes ! yes ! yes !” Archaz hastened to reply.

"Indeed, your majesty is right. I have long been sure that money was taken by some one from your majesty's treasury, and that I knew who that some one was. I hope your majesty will order this ungrateful wretch to be punished as he deserves."

"Your guilt is clear," declared the King. "Don't say anything in your defence, because I won't listen to it. To-morrow morning you shall be hung to the highest gallows that can be erected, and your little body will feast the crows there, as a warning to all malefactors who dare to rob their sovereign. Lead him away, and let the execution be fixed for half-past six."

Mouck had wisely intended not to reveal the secret of his magic wand, but when he heard this sentence pronounced, and found that he was too tightly bound to make use of his magic slippers, he as wisely decided to sacrifice one half of his fortune in order to save the other, and his life along with it. So, requesting a private audience with his majesty, to whom he promised to communicate something of the greatest importance, he threw himself at his feet, and said, with tears—

"Great King, I confess that appearances are overwhelmingly against me, but if you will deign to listen to me a moment, you shall soon know that Mouck is not unfaithful to you. Only give me your royal word to spare my life, and by the beard of the Prophet I swear that I will teach you a secret which will make you more rich than ever was the great Caliph Haroun Alraschid, or that famous merchant Sinbad the Sailor."

The King, who was always in want of money, pricked up his ear at this proposition, and pledged his royal word to grant Mouck's life if he would communicate such an important secret.

Upon receiving this assurance, Mouck presented him with his magic rod, and having explained to him its use, added—

"And now, O King! allow your faithful and unhappy servant to make of you a single and simple request. The little experience I have had of court life has disgusted me with it for ever; allow me then to retire from a sphere in society which does not suit me, and into which chance alone has thrown me."

But while our little friend was making this request

the King was thinking that, if he could discover treasures by means of his wonderful wand, he must have some other trick in his power. It struck his majesty that the swiftness of a dwarf whose legs were so short must be owing to some magical cause ; and this idea had no sooner entered into his head, than he resolved to extort this secret also from poor Mouck, by some means or other.

“I have promised to spare your life,” he said ; “and I swear that not a hair of your head shall be touched. But the crime of which you have been guilty in appropriating treasures found on our royal lands is so great, that I cannot grant you a free pardon. You shall live, but the rest of your days must be spent in prison.”

And after a minute of silence, during which the King was able to study the expression of terror which spread over the dwarf’s face, he added, in a more gentle tone—

“That is to say, unless you consent to reveal to me the means by which you run so swiftly ; in which case I will at once set you at liberty.”

The short time that Little Mouck had passed in

the dungeons of the palace was long enough to disgust him with the very idea of returning to them, and, above all, with the prospect of spending his whole life there ; so he made haste to confess the power which lay in his slippers. Still he had the sense to keep half of the secret to himself, and did not tell the King how to fly by their aid.

“Very well !” said the King, after having put on the slippers, the power of which he wished to make trial of at once,—“very well ! you are free, Mr Mouck ; you are free to quit my kingdom immediately, without saying a word to any one, and without looking behind you. An hour’s delay, a single word to a single person, and I will have you flayed alive. Go !”

This just judgment having been pronounced, the slippers and the stick were carefully locked up by the King, who was delighted at the success of his trickery, and at the prospect of the pleasures which he hoped these two talismans would procure him.

As for poor Mouck, he lost no time in making for the frontier. His fright was so great, that he scarcely

dared stop a moment ; but, accustomed to the aid of his marvellous slippers, he now found himself constantly obliged to rest and take breath. Luckily, the kingdom from which he was being expelled was not large, and, after some half-a-dozen hours' walking, he found himself on the border of it, with weary feet and an empty stomach.

Hitherto he had been going straight on, but as soon as he had crossed the boundary, and was no longer spurred by the fear of being pursued and overtaken, he turned off the high road, and plunged into a vast forest which bordered it, with the intention of henceforth living a solitary life there, so much had his adventures in the world inspired him with a horror of men's cruelty and selfishness.

Wandering through the forest, he came to a beautiful glade where trickled a clear brook over a bed of water-cresses, and between two rows of magnificent fig-trees, with knotty trunks and luxuriant foliage. These trees were loaded with ripe and juicy fruit, which seemed to invite the passers-by to gather them, and would have made a man's mouth water just after

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eating a good dinner. So we may suppose hungry Mouck flew upon them, and ate a dozen almost in as short a time as it takes to write it. They were as delicious as they looked, and he never remembered having eaten better fruit.

When he had satisfied his hunger, he felt thirsty, and lay down beside the brook to drink ; but as soon as he caught sight of his reflection in the water, he started up as if he had seen a hideous reptile at the bottom of the stream. For a moment he stood motionless.

"No, no !" he said, trying to re-assure himself. "It must be the sport of my imagination."

Once more he approached the brook, and cautiously held his head over the water. There was no mistake ! He saw it ornamented with enormous ass's ears, while his nose projected several inches from his face like the snout of a rhinoceros.

"My eyes deceive me !" cried Mouck, in amazement and horror, and he put up his hands to his head.

It was too true ; his ears were nearly half-a-yard long, and his nose, which kept constantly growing, made

him squint terribly, and thus added to his grotesque appearance.

"It is what I deserve," he said bitterly, at length. "I have behaved foolishly, and deserve to have the ears of an ass." And, worn out by his journey, he let himself fall on the turf, and soon fell asleep under the influence of vexation as well as fatigue.

At the end of an hour he awoke, roused by the cravings of his stomach, and set himself to search for some more substantial food than figs. But it was no use to go backwards and forwards; he could discover nothing but figs, and always figs. Certainly they were of different kinds, some green, some yellow, some reddish, others violet. For want of anything else, Mouck had to content himself with this variety in his diet, and as he had already tasted the violet-coloured figs, he now pulled a quantity of the green ones, which he found not less savoury than the first.

He was directing his steps towards the brook to wash down his frugal repast with a mouthful of water, when suddenly he stopped, and shrank from looking at his ignoble portrait in the glassy surface of the

stream. He wished at least to hide under his turban the monstrous ears which rose on each side of his head like two steeples flanking a church ; but his hands in vain fumbled round his head-dress—there was now no trace of the enormous ears which a moment before he had felt catching in the branches of a fig-tree. Quivering with joy, he ran on to the brook, and, to his unspeakable delight, saw that his head had resumed its ordinary appearance.

Now Little Mouck, though ill-educated, was not one of those thoughtless persons who can see an extraordinary thing happen before their eyes without asking themselves the reason of it ; and in this case he felt sure, after reflection, that the mystery must lie in the different coloured figs that he had eaten. If the violet ones produced that dreadful development of the nose and ears which he had suffered, the green ones must be the antidote to the others. So thought Mouck ; and, without venturing to put to trial the properties of the red and yellow figs, he perceived that fortune had thrown in his way a means of recovering the valuable talismans which he had been deprived of.

He set to work, then, and gathered a quantity both of violet and green figs, as many as he could hold in his cloak, which he made into a sort of sack for the purpose, and slinging this over his shoulder, turned his steps toward the very country from which he had just been expelled. At the first town he entered, he disguised himself so effectually that he had no fear of being recognised, and pursued his way without stopping till he reached the capital, where was the King's palace.

It was just the time of the year when ripe fruit is still a rarity, and Mouck, who knew the customs of the palace, did not doubt that his figs would soon attract the attention of his majesty's purveyors. And in fact, he had scarcely installed himself in the market-place, before he saw the head butler making his round among the viands exposed for sale, followed as usual by slaves bearing huge baskets to carry back luxuries for the consumption of the palace.

This official had passed before most of the stalls without seeing anything to satisfy him, when his eye fell on Little Mouck's basket of figs.

“Good luck!” he cried. “Here is something worthy to go into his majesty’s stomach. What is the price of the whole basket?” he asked of the pretended merchant, who named a moderate price, about which no dispute was made; and soon his whole stock was being carried away to the King’s kitchen, and little Mouck was going off to prepare himself for a new part he had to play, in order to accomplish his purpose.

That very evening there was a grand feast at the palace in honour of the twentieth anniversary of his majesty’s accession to the throne. Everything on the table was in the highest style. The cook and the butler had surpassed themselves; and his majesty had already several times condescended to express his satisfaction, when, among the dainties of an exquisite dessert, the figs of Mouck, heaped up into the shape of a pyramid, were presented to the royal guests in a splendid basket of gold filagree.

At this sight, there was a universal cry of admiration, and the King, who had already exhausted all the compliments which he could pay to the officers of

his household, was so well pleased, that he took from his own breast the grand order of *The Knife and Fork*, and was pleased with his own royal hands to bestow it upon the chief butler, who received the precious distinction on his knees, and wept for joy.

His majesty, with his usual politeness, ordered the basket to be first presented to the Queen and his daughters ; then he partook of its contents himself ; and what was left he handed over to the other guests, among whom were the princes of the blood royal, and the chief officers of state.

One of these latter, the Grand Mufti, who prided himself on his eloquence, had kept till this moment the speech which, on such occasions, it was his custom to address to the King—a speech always made in the same terms, and which the King always listened to with the same serious air. But this evening, the Grand Mufti had scarcely unrolled his paper, and pronounced the words, “Mighty monarch,” with which he always commenced, than he heard stifled laughter bursting out all round him,

The orator looked annoyed at this strange and un

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'Every one of the guests had laughed heartily to see the lengthening ears of his neighbour, but all present soon found that they were no more lucky than others on this score.'—STORIES FROM OVER THE SEA, page 193.

usual reception with which he found his official rhetoric greeted ; but when he, in his turn, had cast a glance round the table, and seen the heads of his neighbours, he began to titter like the rest of them, and soon the whole room was filled by a tremendous burst of laughter.

This laughter was loud, but not long. Every one of the guests had laughed heartily to see the lengthening ears of his neighbour, but his next impulse was to assure himself of the state of his own ; and all present soon found that they were no more lucky than others on this score. As for the ears of the King, they were so majestically elongated, that the Grand Mufti himself only seemed like a donkey beside him, although his ears stuck out a foot beyond his turban.

And before those present had recovered from such a shock, they began to notice the unusual length of each other's noses, and then their own. Horror upon horror ! All the court were in consternation, not knowing what might happen next, and scarcely daring to look in a mirror for fear of witnessing some new monstrosity. .

The whole body of physicians, small and great, were sent for from all parts of the kingdom, and together and separately were consulted upon this extraordinary affliction, which none of them had the least idea how to cure, though every one of them could talk about it for hours together.

An ingenious surgeon then presented himself, who proposed simply to cut off the noses and ears of these unfortunate persons, and undertook to heal such as might honour him with their confidence so far as to submit to an operation. But all of them thought the remedy worse than the disease, all except the Princess Amarza, who could not console herself for the loss of her delicate little pink ears and her exquisitely-shaped nose. But, alas! it was in vain that she emboldened herself to suffer this horrible operation, poor child! The blood had scarcely been wiped from her lovely face before her nose and ears were seen to be growing again as fast as ever.

In this state of affairs it was announced to the King that an old dervish wished to have an interview with him.

"I have no time to see old dervishes," groaned the King, who, since his misfortune, had done nothing but lie in bed in a dark room, and durst not face the public gaze of his people.

"May it please your gracious majesty, this person professes to be able to cure the disease from which your majesty's court is suffering."

"Bring him in this moment," cried the King.

A little old man, bent double by age, dressed in a wide black mantle and a turban of the shape of a pyramid, and whose long black beard reached almost to his feet, was brought in by the slaves, and approached the royal presence with profound salutations.

"The malady which has attacked you and yours," said he to the King, "is only a natural disease, and will disappear before ordinary remedies. It must be the punishment of some great crime lately committed, and for which you have neglected to perform the proper expiations. But, with the help of Heaven, I can cure you—I can cure you ; and, as a proof of my power—behold !"

As he spoke, the dervish kept approaching the Princess Amarza, who was hiding herself in a corner, and trying to cover her face with her two little hands.

“Look here, my dear!—eat this;” and he presented to her a box containing a sort of jelly, of a greenish colour.

If it had been necessary, the Princess would have swallowed scorpions to regain her beauty. So she did not require to be pressed to taste the dervish’s drug. She took a mouthful of it, and another, and a third. Suddenly, a cry of delight rang through the apartment. Her Royal Highness had become more beautiful than ever, a fact of which she assured herself by rushing to a mirror. One glance restored all her good-humour. Her nose and ears had returned to their ordinary proportions.

Astonished by the suddenness of this cure, the King was still gazing on his daughter, when the dervish returned to his side, and said—

“What will your majesty give me, if, by the power of my art, I do for your majesty and for all the court what I have just done for the Princess Amarza?”

"You have only to ask, dear dervish. I promise to grant your request, however large it be—that is, anything within reason."

The dervish seemed to doubt the royal word, for he hesitated before making his request.

"Come," cried the King, rising from his seat, "come, and you shall choose for yourself."

And leading the stranger to his treasury, he exhibited all the riches that it contained, begging him to choose whatever pleased him, or even to take all, if he would only restore to him a human countenance.

As soon as he found himself among his majesty's valuables, the dervish, or rather Mouck—for it was he, as will have been recognised by the attentive reader—began to look sharply about him, and before long perceived in a corner his dear slippers and his little cane. Towards them he kept gradually advancing, pretending to examine attentively the rich and rare ornaments which met his eye on every side.

When he was only three paces from the slippers, he leaped into them with a single bound, seized his magic wand with one hand, and with the other tore

off his false beard and showed to the astonished eyes of the King the well-known features of the banished Mouck.

“Perfidious king!” he cried, “perfidious and foolish monarch, who rewards with ingratitude the faithful services of your true friends, while you allow yourself to be deceived by the most audacious scoundrels; false, avaricious, and ungrateful sovereign, the deformity which has afflicted you is the just punishment of your silly cunning. You shall keep your ass’s ears; you shall keep them for ever, that they may unceasingly remind you of your unworthy treatment of poor Mouck.”

“Scoundrel!” exclaimed the King, recovering from his amazement. “Do not think you shall escape me! You shall perish under the lash;” and with all the force of his lungs he shouted for his attendants.

But Mouck turned quickly round on his heel, and desired to be carried a hundred leagues away. Before the King’s eyes he rose on the air, and giving a tweak to his majesty’s enormous ears and nose as he passed, he flew through the open window like a bird, and

was out of sight before the attendants had arrived. Indeed, one minute sufficed to put a hundred leagues between him and any one who cared to pursue him.

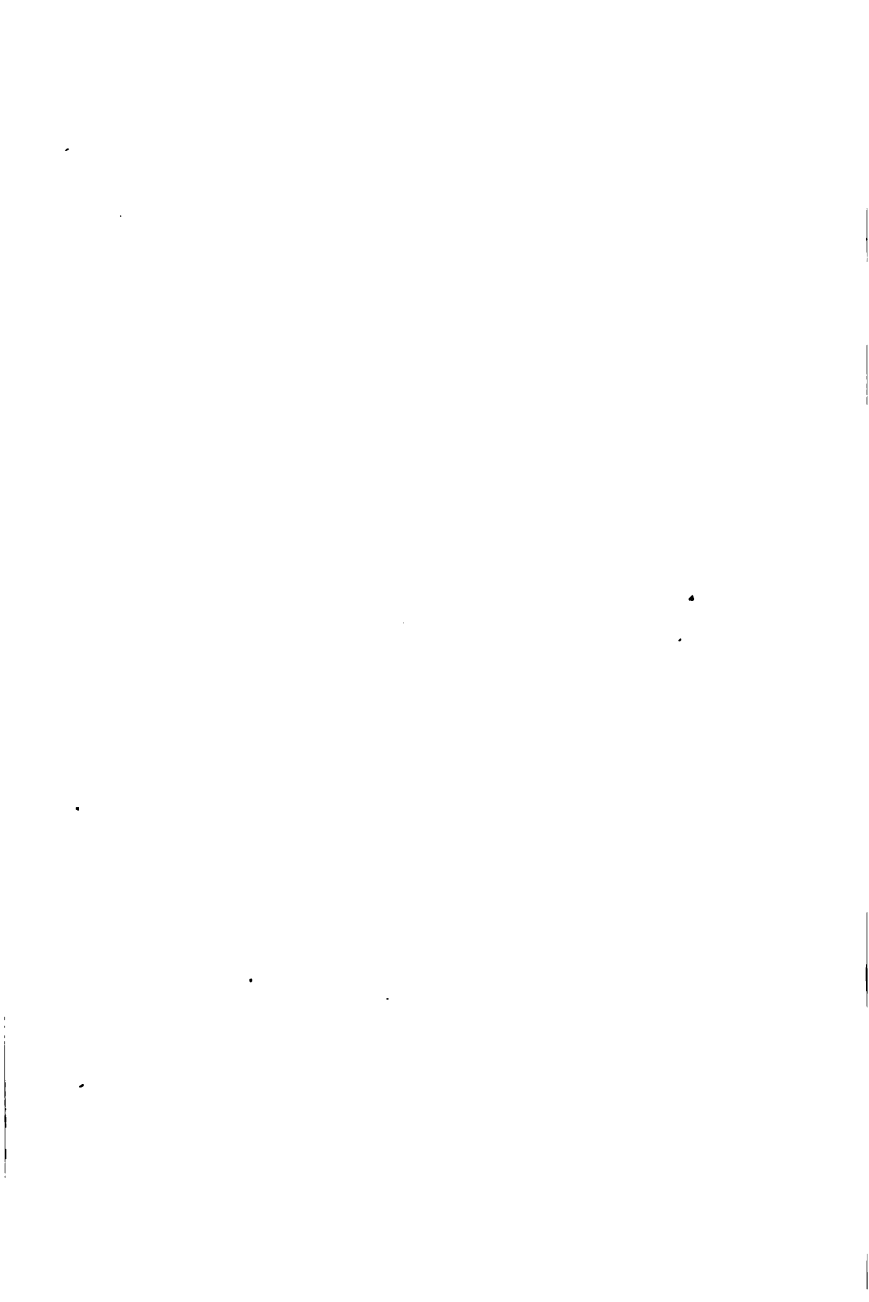
In this clever and daring way, having recovered his two talismans, Little Mouck travelled all through the world with them, and by their help succeeded in making a large fortune, which would have been larger, had he not been so unselfish and so simple-minded. He believed that these wonderful talismans had been placed in his hands for the benefit of his fellow-creatures rather than of himself, and when he found treasures for others, he could scarcely be prevailed upon to take the share which was sometimes gratefully pressed upon him by those whom he had thus obliged ; while in other and more frequent cases, the greedy owners, seeing with what sort of person they had to deal, drove him off without the slightest recompense, as soon as they had availed themselves of his services.

At length he returned to settle at his native town of Nicea, where he lived all the rest of his life in comfort and retirement, his short experi-

ence of the ways of men not having inspired him with any great confidence in or affection for them. So Little Mouck lived harmless and solitary, and died at a good old age, leaving all his money to found an hospital for homeless and infirm dogs.



GREED AND GAIN.





GREED AND GAIN.

BENEATH a blazing African sun, two men mounted on stout asses were making their way among a range of hills not far from the coast of Senegal. The dress and language of these travellers must have seemed and sounded strange to any native of that barbarous country for they were two French sailors, by name Stephen Riou and Michael Lorient, who had deserted from their ship, and were trying to push into the interior, in the hope of being able to trade with the natives for gold-dust or other valuable articles.

Stephen, bolder than his companion, and more eager for gain and discovery, was leading the way,

with his gun slung across his shoulder, and his pistols in his belt, ready to hand. His eye was constantly wandering over the horizon, not from admiration of the scenery, but in search of a wreath of smoke, the pointed roofs of a native village, or some other token of human habitation.

“Nothing to be seen!” he exclaimed, at length.

“Nothing!” growled Michael; “and here I am half dead with hunger. What a wretched country this is!”

“Well, we needn’t complain; we have done pretty well. Have we not already got gold-dust enough to make us rich men when we get back to France, not to speak of the other things;” and Stephen slapped the large package which, like his companion, he carried before him, carefully secured to his saddle.

“I would give it all to get safely back to France. I wouldn’t lead such a life long for all the gold-dust in the world. Sleeping in the open air, with, as likely as not, a dozen or two of lions howling round you, and getting next to nothing to eat but maize crushed between two stones! It’s lucky if we can shoot a

monkey now and then to make a Sunday dinner. A nice life indeed ! I wish you had never persuaded me to leave the ship."

"Be quiet!" said Stephen, silencing the other's grumbling. "Here is a chance of something better to eat. Do you see that thicket? are there not some men under the shadow of the trees?"

"You are right; a troop of niggers, and not enough of them to be afraid of! Come along!" cried Michael, stirring up his jaded beast.

The two sailors hastened towards the thicket, and perceived that they had fallen in with a family of *marabouts*, as the Mahometan negroes call their priests. These marabouts go about from village to village, instructing the young in the principles of their religion, and selling texts from the Koran, written out and enclosed in cases, which the negroes look upon as powerful talismans, and call *gris-gris*.

When Stephen and Michael came up to the trees beneath which the black priest had encamped, they found him employed in teaching his children to write on pieces of wood, so that they in time might be able

to follow the business of manufacturing *gris-gris*. Several asses were browsing round about, and a small heap of bales lay at the foot of one of the trees; for the marabout often is a trader as well as a priest, and with more security than any one else, his sacred character sheltering him from all molestation, even in time of war.

When they saw the two strangers, the children cried out and stared, and the marabout rose to salute them, casting a sly glance at the packages which they bore on their saddles. Both the sailors had often served in ships engaged in the Senegal trade, and had picked up a good deal of the language of the natives, so they had no difficulty in explaining that they were in want of provisions.

"The men of our profession are poor, and have more need to get than to give," replied the marabout; but, on being told that he would be well paid, he called one of the women, who soon set before the travellers a meal consisting of cakes of maize baked on the coals, a piece of honeycomb found in the hollow of a tree, and two gourds full of a sort of liquor called *bullo*.

When the travellers had eaten to their hearts' content, Stephen was rummaging among one of their packages for something to give their host in payment. At the sight of the merchandise they carried, the marabout's eyes lit up with greed and curiosity, and he began to draw nearer.

"Look out! The negro parson is looking at our wares rather too closely," said Michael. "Shut it up."

Stephen at once was about to put back his bundle on the back of the ass, but it slipped from his hands, and part of its contents fell on the ground.

"Pick them up! pick them up!" cried Stephen, angrily; and then, turning to the marabout, he bade him stand back and mind his own business.

Their new acquaintance pretended to be astonished that they should doubt his good intentions, but as he spoke, he contrived to reach with his foot a string of coral beads which had fallen behind a tuft of grass. Slyly he drew back his foot, picked up the ornament, and contrived to slip it into the folds of his dress. But Stephen had seen him; he ran forward, and,

seizing the marabout roughly, pulled out the string of coral, and put it back into the bundle.

"Ah! you thief! have you the impudence to rob us at the very moment that you are talking of your honesty?"

"It was a mistake," said the negro, coolly; and Stephen shook his fist at him, and cried—

"Come on, Michael; if you have finished picking up these things, we will be off, or the scoundrel will steal everything we have."

"But are you not going to pay me?" cried the marabout, as they were moving away.

"Haven't you paid yourself? Have you not stolen something besides the bracelet?"

"Nothing."

"Well, it will be a lesson for you."

And the two companions were moving off, but the old negro ran after them, and caught hold of the bridle of Stephen's ass, at the same time drawing a dagger from his girdle. The sailor pulled out a pistol.

"Take care, old Snowball," he said. "You know your talismans are no good against the *puffs*. People

didn't know anything about gunpowder in Mahomet's time, so he couldn't put any *gris-gris* of that sort in the Koran. Better behave yourself, and let us go quietly on."

The negro sprang back at the sight of the pistol, but he pursued them with threatening shouts and gestures till they were out of sight, and then, muttering some words under his breath, rejoined his family beneath the shade of the thicket.

Without paying any more attention to him, the travellers went on their way, and towards evening perceived the town of Sonka, composed, like other towns on the west coast of Africa, of two or three hundred habitations scattered about without any fixed plan, each of them comprising a greater or less number of round huts made of reeds and red earth. A double palisade, with wooden towers at short intervals, surrounded the whole town, and defended it against the attacks of wild beasts or hostile tribes.

Stephen and Michael had reached the cultivated fields in the neighbourhood of the town, when a cloud of dust behind them attracted their attention, and they

soon found that it announced the approach of the Serakik, or king of the country, who was proceeding to Sonka, attended by all his savage court. The sailors thought it as well to wait for his approach.

His sable majesty, as well as the principal officers of his court, was on horseback, and presented a much more imposing appearance than any of his European fellow-sovereigns. His red dress was covered with the tails and tusks of elephants, and on his head he wore an enormous wicker-work hat ornamented with goats' horns. Behind him came his wives in litters borne by camels, then the rest of his people, mounted on asses and oxen; some of them were even riding on the backs of strong slaves, whom they forced to run at full speed and keep up with the rest of the caravan.

As soon as the guards who preceded the Serakik perceived the two Europeans, they rushed towards them, brandishing their javelins, and Stephen and Michael, who understood the customs of the country, came to meet them, pistols-in-hand. The negroes stopped some paces off, and Riou cried out that

they came to pay their respects to the Serakik. 'Accordingly they were conducted towards his majesty, who received them graciously, and made haste to ask if they had anything to give him. Michael replied that they were about to offer him a present which they hoped would please him ; and the royal face, black as it was, lit up with delight as he requested the two sailors to take their place in his procession, and continued his journey towards Sonka.

Before long the palace was reached ; a strange palace it seemed for a powerful monarch, who could cut off a hundred heads a day, if he were in the humour. It was nothing but a large enclosure shaded with palm-trees, in which were scattered about some dozens of huts for the accommodation of the King and his followers. One of these was allotted to the two Europeans, who found that it consisted of a single little room without windows. The door was so narrow that they had to creep through it, and there was no furniture inside except a mat stretched on four posts in such manner as to form a bed, a few gourds, and a wooden mortar for pounding maize.

But before they had been there long, they were summoned to the presence of the Serakik, who was waiting for them in the middle of his court, all assembled in full magnificence. The sailors treated him with great respect, and gave him some cheap knives and a whistle, receiving in return a few *kolla* nuts, which the natives are very fond of chewing, and which serve for money in Africa, being held as worth their weight in gold. His majesty was so delighted with the whistle, that he would attend to nothing else for the time; and his guests were allowed to go and pay their respects to the Queen, whom they found surrounded by her attendants in another part of the royal abode.

She seemed to be more intelligent and more friendly towards the travellers than her husband; and when they presented her with a dozen little bells—with which she adorned herself on the spot—she was delighted beyond measure, and showed herself disposed to do everything in her power to assist them. After inquiring in which direction they meant to travel, and for what they wished to trade, she sent

to the King a slave, who presently returned, bearing a short staff curiously ornamented with strips of coloured leather. This she placed in Stephen's hands, informing him that it was a token which would ensure them free passage through the territories of her husband and his allies. Moreover, she warned them what districts to avoid as unfriendly, and gave them much other useful advice; so that a present, in reality of small value, has seldom been so profitably bestowed.

When the King had got tired of blowing his whistle, he summoned his guests to a feast, at which they were regaled with goats' flesh, cakes of maize, gourds of palm-wine, several kinds of fruit, and a sort of lemonade made of honey and tamarinds. When all present had eaten a great deal more than could have been good for them, an entertainment followed, in which specimens of the native dancing and singing were exhibited to the strangers, and the end of it was that the whole company, including the royal family, worked themselves into a state of the highest excitement, and danced about as if they had

all gone mad, after which they began to think of retiring to rest.

It was dark before the two sailors repaired to their hut, so they did not notice a man who was creeping about in the shadow of the other buildings, and watching them with no little curiosity. This was the same marabout that they had fallen in with in the morning, and who now, after seeing them safely inside their apartment, stole away with threatening gestures. But his malicious plans were foiled for the time; for very early in the morning Stephen and Michael were awakened by one of the Queen's attendants, sent to warn them that they must depart without a moment's delay, as a marabout called Toni had complained of their conduct, and persuaded the King to have them arrested.

This advice was not to be neglected; so, hastily putting together their small stock of merchandise, they saddled their asses and followed their guide out of the palace, congratulating themselves on their lucky escape.

The guide led them for some distance along the

banks of a river, then turned into a wood where it seemed more likely that they would escape any pursuit that might be made. But now the truth of the old proverb about not thinking one's-self safe till one is out of the wood was realised, for as they were going quietly along, they heard a great noise of drums and horns, and perceived right before them a body of cavalry equipped in the military fashion of that country. Each horseman was dressed in a great deal of gaudy clothing, which was perfectly covered with brooches, bangles, and boxes containing *gris-gris* or charms against various kinds of danger. They were armed with swords, spears, bows, quivers full of poisoned arrows, and javelins attached to their saddles by cords, so that they could be drawn back again after being thrown. But most of these cavaliers were so loaded with ornaments, that it seemed difficult for them to manage their arms, and when one of them fell from his horse, he was generally unable to get up again without the assistance of his comrades. In the rear came three camels, each bearing on its back two small cannon, and these were followed by a large

number of asses and oxen loaded with baggage and provisions.

The fugitives, who had turned aside into a little clearing in the wood, counted six hundred of these warriors file past them, and hoped that they would escape observation. But suddenly a cry from one of the scouts showed them that they were discovered; and as the thickness of the wood behind and on each side made it useless to fly, they were soon surrounded and brought into the presence of the leader of this imposing force. But now the staff which they had received from the King stood them in good stead. As soon as the General saw it, he put both his hands to his forehead and bowed low with the utmost respect. Then, dismounting from his horse, he invited the Frenchmen to do so also, and share some refreshments, an invitation which they were not sorry to accept, even if they had dared to refuse it, for their long and hurried ride had given them an excellent appetite for breakfast. So down they sat, and were soon engaged upon the national dish of *kus-kus*, or cakes of maize.

But this delay was a fatal one, for before they had finished eating, two horsemen arrived at full gallop, bearing an order from the Serakik that the foreigners should instantly return to Sonka. Resistance was useless, and, in no very pleasant frame of mind, Stephen and Michael were obliged to obey, and set out escorted by the whole force.

They found his majesty sitting cross-legged on a mat before his hut, smoking a large stone-pipe. To make himself look more majestic, he wore a footman's cast-off livery and a grenadier's bearskin hat, adorned with ostrich feathers. Behind him stood the marabout Toni, whom the travellers recognised only too well. The negro prince looked angrily at them, and cried out—

“Why have you stolen away like thieves who fear to be punished?”

Riou did his best to make a speech, saying that they were honest traders, who were obliged to travel into the interior without delay, and believed they had his majesty's leave to proceed; but the King was not appeased.

"Who gave you leave to trade? Do you not know that no one is allowed to trade here without my leave? You have paid me no tax."

The sailors looked at each other, and muttered something about their poverty.

"You are liars!" cried the King. "You are rich. You are liars! I know that you have *sangara*."

Stephen and Michael had in fact some gourds full of brandy, which they had tried to keep carefully concealed for their own use, but had not been able to hide from the keen eye of the marabout. They were very loath to deliver up any of the precious liquor, but there was nothing for it but to reply that they did possess a little *sangara*, and that they were ready to let the King taste it.

"Be quick!" was his answer to this offer; and Michael produced one of the gourds hid among their baggage, and handed it to him. He greedily snatched it, swallowed nearly half its contents at a single gulp, then passing his hand over his stomach with a brutal grin, mumbled out—

"Sunshine for the inside!"

But when he began to take another draught, the marabout, who was watching him with glittering eyes, thought it was time to put in a word for himself. He bent over the Serakik, and whispered in his ear—

“What is left in the gourd will be enough to buy a *gris-gris* against the bite of serpents.”

“There are no serpents in my palace. I am not afraid of serpents,” exclaimed the Serakik, hugging the bottle, and taking another sip.

“I can give you a charm against arrows,” persisted the marabout.

“What do I care for arrows? I never go—” said the Serakik, and he would have finished “to war,” if the gourd, again raised to his lips, had not cut short the sentence.

“Against fever.”

“I don’t feel unwell.”

“Against lions.”

“If my guards were to let a lion come within a mile of me, I should cut off their heads.”

“Against poison.”

“Against poison !” repeated the Serakik. “Why

did you not say so before? The gourd is empty!" and he looked at it regretfully, annoyed either because there was no more to drink, or because he had lost a chance of buying a charm against a danger of which he was in daily dread.

"There are some more there," suggested Toni, pointing to the prisoners' packages.

"More! Give them up," roared the King, who was now as drunk as a lord. "Make them give them up, and I will let you have a share for a *gris-gris* against poison."

The two sailors heard this order in dismay. They were not going to submit tamely, and Michael at once sat down on his property, crying out—

"Surely the Serakik will not rob his guests!"

"Do you dare to give me advice? Do you know that I am a great prince?" hiccoughed his majesty.

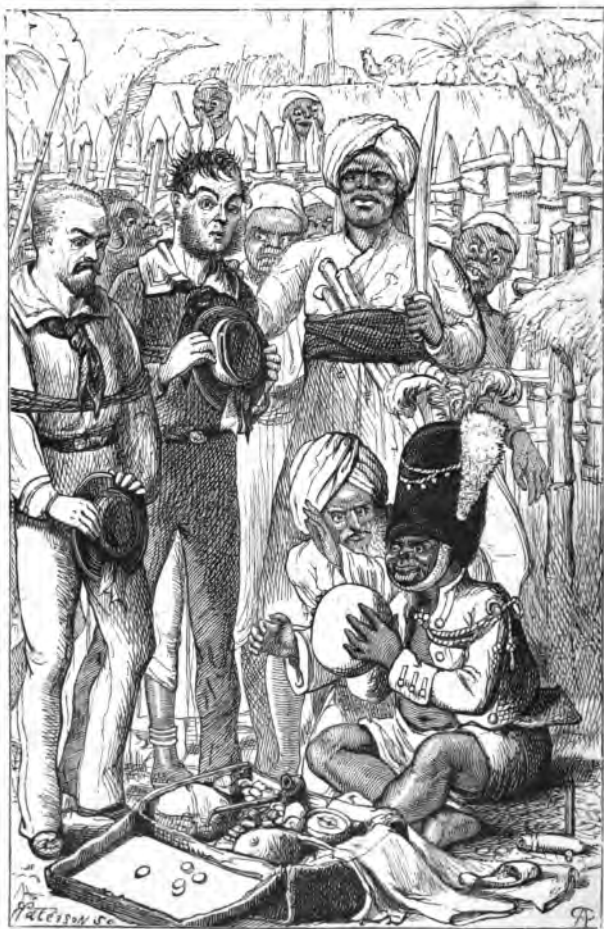
"But think"——

"I am a great prince—a noble prince!"

"Then you would not wish to"——

"I can do whatever I wish. I can take all you have if I wish—I am such a great prince!"





'Fancy the feelings of the sailors when they saw the triumph of their cunning enemy, the Marabout. Before their eyes he finished drinking all their brandy with the Serakik.'—STORIES FROM OVER THE SEA, page 221.

"But"—

"And I will take everything."

Stephen and Michael would have defended their property, but, at a sign from the Serakik, they found themselves seized, bound, and gagged before they could draw a trigger.

"Kill them if they move," shouted the King, rummaging with his own royal hands among their goods. "I confiscate everything. I am a noble prince. This gourd is for me, the greatest prince in the world. Here is one for you, marabout. All these knives and necklaces are mine. I am a great prince!"

Fancy the feelings of the sailors when they saw the triumph of their cunning enemy, the marabout. Before their eyes he finished drinking all their brandy with the Serakik; and as his majesty had the lion's share and got more completely drunk than Toni, the latter was able to make a very good bargain with him for the greater part of their merchandise in exchange for his worthless *gris-gris*.

Stephen and Michael were now taken to a hut,

where they remained for several hours unable to speak or move hand or foot. At nightfall, they were visited by the same slave who had been their guide in the morning, and who was now sent by the Queen to cut their bonds, and to bring them some rice and honey by way of supper. But both of them were too mortified and indignant to have much appetite. Up till this day, everything had been favourable to them. In a short time they had collected more gold-dust than they could have gained by half-a-dozen years' service on board ship, and they were beginning to dream of far greater riches, when suddenly all had been lost through the maliciousness of the wretched marabout. Less covetous men than our adventurers might well have been angry, and these two were driven wild with rage. Their first thought was revenge on the marabout, but seeing no way to satisfy their hate upon him, they turned it on each other, and each began bitterly to accuse his companion, as the cause of this disaster. Love of gain, not friendship, had brought them together, and this, when disappointed, could turn them into enemies with as

great ease. Misfortune is the truest of tests by which to try our sentiments ; friendships which spring from the heart it makes all the more tender and devoted, but it never fails to destroy those of which the only bond is selfish interest.

The sailors were beginning to abuse each other for the hundredth time, but they were suddenly interrupted by a burst of laughter, and, to their amazement, they saw enter their hut—who, but the marabout himself!

At this sight, Stephen and Michael forgot their quarrel, and sprung upon him ; but Toni, whom the brandy that had made the King drunk had only made bold, shook them off, and said, in a friendly tone—

“Let not my white brothers be angry ; I have come to console them.”

“Traitor ! thief ! wretch ! dog !” cried the Frenchmen, using every abusive epithet that their knowledge of the language allowed them.

“Come ! peace !” said the marabout, coolly sitting down on a mat, and placing before him one of their

gourds of brandy, still almost full. "See, I have kept a share for you; drink, and let us talk a little."

"Away with you, scoundrel," cried Stephen. "Out of my sight, or I will kill you, though I should die for it next moment."

"Kill me! And I am come to show you how to get rich!" replied Toni, with a mysterious air.

"To get rich, when, thanks to you, we have just been robbed of all we have!"

"What matter, when I can tell you how to get a thousand times more."

"What do you mean?"

The marabout made them a sign to speak low, then took a drink from the gourd, and handed it to them. They followed his example, and seeing that he had for the moment disarmed their resentment and secured their attention, he went on—

"My white brothers live in a country where plenty of iron and copper are found?"

"Well, what if we do?" said Stephen.

"It is a great blessing from Heaven," rejoined the

marabout ; "but how do my white brothers find these metals and get them out of the earth?"

"Oh ! we have ways of doing this."

"And if we have gold, can you find it and dig it up?"

"Trust us for that ! But what do these questions mean?"

The marabout looked round, then, lowering his voice still more, he whispered—

"If you can do here what you can do at home, I know a valley, a day's journey from Sonka, which is full of gold."

"Indeed !" cried in one breath Stephen and Michael, whose attention was now thoroughly aroused.

"I got some there myself not a month ago."

"You did?"

"Yes ; but we are not so clever as the white people. You can charm gold out of the earth ; it plays us tricks, and escapes from us like the hare and the stag from the hunter. When we dig in one place, it flies to another, and we can only pick up a little on the surface of the earth and in the beds of rivers."

"And is there much gold in this place?"

"I brought away more than one of my strongest slaves could carry."

"It is a lie!" cried Stephen, in amazement.

"I swear"——

"A lie! Why, you would be richer than the Serakik."

"And perhaps I am."

"Where is your gold then?"

"I exchanged it with an Arabian merchant for something more precious."

"Something more precious than gold?"

"And more easy to take care of."

"It is all a lie, I tell you," repeated Stephen, excitedly.

"A lie!" replied Toni, drawing from his bosom a small leather box. "Well, look here!"

He carefully opened the box, and the two sailors saw a diamond of enormous size, which glittered even in that dim light. They uttered an involuntary cry of admiration.

"Do you believe me now?" asked the marabout, with a triumphant smile.

"It is a diamond fit for an emperor's crown!" cried Michael.

"How much will you sell it for?" said Stephen.

"We will give you"—began Michael, then stopped, and gnashed his teeth with rage as he remembered how they had just lost all their wares.

"Do not be angry," said the marabout. "My white brothers can recover all they have lost, and get much more. I will lead them to the valley of gold; they will find it, and we will share—shall we not?"

There was nothing for it but to accept these conditions. After some talk the sailors agreed, and it was arranged to set out at daybreak next morning. Toni undertook to get back their arms and their beasts from the Serakik, and left them with many professions of friendship, and injunctions to secrecy.

When he was gone, the two Europeans sat still for some time without speaking. At length Stephen struck his foot on the floor, and cried out—

"Such a treasure to belong to that wretch, when we poor fellows have lost the few ounces of gold that we had scraped together with such difficulty!"

"My uncle was a jeweller," said Michael, "and I have often heard him speak of the value of precious stones. This one must be worth thousands."

"Why, we might both go back to France, rolling in riches, and live there like lords all the rest of our lives!"

"If we had not been robbed, we might have made a bargain with this scoundrel. He has already taken all we have."

"By heaven! it would be only fair to make him pay us back!"

"And it would be easy, as we are going to travel together and alone."

They looked at each other, and understood.

"Well, it is agreed," muttered Stephen, clenching his fist. "At any risk, to-morrow we shall make our fortunes."

"And the next day," said Michael, "we shall set off for St Louis."

Then they pressed each other's hands, and lay down to take a few hours sleep, from which, at the appointed time, they were awakened by the marabout, who brought their asses, and also their arms, which

by some means or other he had contrived to get out of the King's clutches. But he did not restore to them their powder, either because he wished to keep it himself, or because he was suspicious, as he had a good right to be, that they might use it to his disadvantage. If his eyes had not been blinded by the hope of gain, he might have carried his suspicions a little further.

The party left the palace without hindrance, and, the marabout leading the way, proceeded in the opposite direction from that in which the two sailors had tried to escape on the previous day. Before long they found the country grow more barren, and only a few tufts of withered grass could be seen in the brown sand. But a sight which delighted them more than the richest vegetation would have done was that of shallow ditches which had been dug in the search for gold-dust. They were scarcely three feet deep, for the negroes do not understand the use of any other instrument than the shovel, with which they turn over the ground here and there by chance, washing the earth to separate any particles of gold which it may

contain, and often making hundreds of unsuccessful trials before finding what they are looking for.

Towards nightfall they camped at the foot of a small hillock. As they had seen the traces of several lions, they were at pains to gather as much dry grass and wood as they could find in that desolate spot, and lit several fires, forming a circle, in the middle of which they retired to rest with their beasts. The howlings of wild beasts, which began to be heard all round as soon as it was dark, showed them that this precaution was by no means a useless one, and they agreed to sit up in turns and attend to the fires. First Toni undertook this duty ; then it was Stephen's turn. But he, as soon as he saw the marabout asleep, roused Michael, and a whispered conversation took place between them.

"We can't have a better chance," said Stephen, glancing at their companion.

"That's true," said Michael.

"Well, which of us is to take it from him ?"

"You are stronger than me, Stephen."

"You are afraid, that's it !"

"I am afraid he may escape unless you grapple with him."

"You saw him put the diamond in his belt?"

"Yes, he is sleeping with his hand over it."

"Well, we must have it at all risks."

"And if he should defend himself?"

"Aren't there two of us? Draw your cutlass and stand by me."

Michael drew his cutlass; the other sailor cautiously approached the marabout, then suddenly knelt down on his breast and seized his girdle.

Thus roughly awakened, Toni uttered a cry and made a desperate attempt to free himself. He succeeded in shaking off Stephen, but not in loosening his hold, and a fierce struggle now took place between them. Locked in each other's arms, they rolled over the sand to the edge of the circle of fires. There Toni got the upper hand, and held the sailor down among the embers till he screamed with pain.

"Help me, Michael! your cutlass! your cutlass!"

Michael seemed to hesitate about striking the mara.

bout, but he caught hold of him, and tried to drag him away from his comrade.

"Coward!" cried Stephen, making a vigorous effort, and springing to his feet.

In an instant he had snatched the weapon from Michael's hesitating hand, and cut down the marabout as he turned to fly. Only one more blow was necessary, and Toni would never again be able to defend his property. The diamond was theirs!

After this dreadful deed, the sailors thought of nothing but of hurrying away from the place where it had been done. They marched night and day, faced heat and cold, braved all the perils of marshes and mountains, and, through countries inhabited by wild beasts or hostile tribes, directed their way to the sea. It was only when they believed themselves far beyond the reach of pursuit, that they began to think of the change of position which seemed to lie before them.

The sale of the diamond, even much below its value, would assure to both of them far greater riches than they had ever ventured to hope, even in their wildest dreams. Of course they formed a thousand plans for

the spending of these riches, but it was soon evident that they were not of one mind on this point, though both looked forward to the same pleasures of luxury and idleness. Each of them silently formed a resolution that he would separate from his companion as soon as their common treasure should have been turned into money.

Then it was not easy for them to agree about how and where it should be sold. Michael wished to sell it to the manager of the French trading company at the settlement of St Louis, if he were found willing to give a good price for it. Stephen, on the other hand, wanted to take it to France, where he was sure that they should be able to make a better bargain. The avarice of the one was more cool and calculating; the other gave way to his eager desire to secure and enjoy their good fortune as soon as possible. Good fortune, did they call it? They had yet to learn that crime can bring no real good fortune, and that the greed of gain is nought but loss and destruction.

The disputes of the two sailors soon began to irritate their minds against each other. A sort of

sullen hostility sprung up between these involuntary comrades. Each began to regard the other with suspicion, and, one day, chance having separated them for a time, Michael accused Stephen of wishing to abandon him. Then began a quarrel which had almost ended in bloodshed ; but the thought of being left alone in that strange and barbarous country held their hands, and it was agreed that each of them should take charge of the diamond in turn.

From distrust to hatred is only one step, and an easy one ; so Stephen and Michael soon came to hate each other. The idea of sharing the price of the diamond became unsupportable to both of them ; for, as usually happens, their covetousness had increased along with their gains. Each of them kept thinking that, without the other's presence, the treasure would have belonged to him alone ; and if wishing could have rid either of an unwelcome companion, neither would have survived long. The part which they had both taken in Toni's murder bound them together after a fashion, and yet made the bond a most odious one, for they were perpetually remem-

bering this crime with fear and horror, and could not possibly throw the blame of it off themselves.

One day Michael fell sick, and for a little Stephen saw some prospect of his remaining sole master of the diamond. Even if he had taken much pains to conceal his thoughts, Michael would have guessed them by the light of his own. A scene of bitter reproach took place between them, and from that day their enmity was open and avowed. Such were the first fruits of the marabout's blood.

The fatigues of the journey increased their ill-feeling. Though possessors of an article of such value, they were indeed worse off than ever they had been as poor but honest sailors. One of their asses had died after being ridden too hard ; the other had been carried away by a lion before their eyes. They had no gunpowder, and no goods to trade with the natives ; so, after a long day's tramp, they often found themselves in want of food, and were obliged, to save themselves from dying of hunger, to exchange nearly all their clothes for rice and maize. These scanty supplies they could not divide without quarrelling ;

and thus hunger came to the help of avarice, and made them hate each other more than ever.

At length, however, they safely reached the banks of the Sanaga, or Senegal river, at the mouth of which they knew that they should find St Louis. All would now go well, if they could but get a boat in which to descend the river; and, after some difficulty, they found a native chief who was willing to sell them an old canoe for their two guns. This bad bargain they had to accept. The canoe was repaired with bark, the seams being filled with a mixture of lime and palm-oil, and the traders embarked upon what they hoped would be the last stage of their journey.

But there were still dangers to be passed through. No one could sail on the Sanaga without running the risk of coming upon a hippopotamus, and being upset by the shock. This accident had often happened to more solidly-constructed barks than a frail canoe, and it could not but be a most dangerous one even to expert swimmers, seeing that in certain places the Sanaga seemed to be almost covered with crocodiles. They could often be seen on all sides, floating mo-

tionless on the surface like logs of wood ; but at the least stir in the water, these hideous bodies would start, as it were, to life, and spring eagerly upon their prey. The fear of such a danger obliged Stephen and Michael to continue their journey only by daylight. At night they used to anchor their boat by two large stones, and often spent half the hours that should have been devoted to slumber in trembling at the strange sights and sounds which surrounded them.

Nor did their privations grow less as they approached that part of the country where the inhabitants were more familiar with Europeans and their wares. It became more difficult to obtain food in exchange for such trifles as the buttons and rags of cloth which were all they had to offer ; and each grudged the other his share of this food more bitterly. They no longer spoke to each other, unless it was absolutely necessary ; but their famished and threatening looks told their feelings clearly enough. Both seemed to be only awaiting an excuse for a deadly struggle, and they would no doubt have soon found

one, if both had not been equally afraid of the issue. Their strength had been taken away by fatigue and famine, which had only fed their enmity.

One morning, Stephen had remained asleep at the bottom of the canoe, while Michael had gone on shore to search for some provisions. Hunger made the former wake sooner than was his custom. He slowly raised his head above the side of the boat, and looking to see what had become of Michael, soon perceived his companion on shore a little distance off. He was eagerly drinking a calabash full of milk, which an old negress had just handed him.

"Scoundrel!" called out Stephen, with an oath.

Michael turned round, and looked confused.

"Ah! you thought I was asleep, you blackguard!" cried the other, shaking his fist. "This is the way you keep our agreement. You let me die of hunger, and you gorge on all you can get."

"Don't make such a noise about it. Push in the boat, and you shall have some, too."

"Curse me if I take the trouble. You can come to it, if you wish."

"Then you must go without your breakfast, for I am not coming into the water to please you."

"And you must go without the diamond," shouted Stephen, "for if you don't come into the boat this moment, I am off by myself," and as he spoke, he began to pull up the cord by which the boat was moored to the bottom of the river.

"For heaven's sake, don't do that," entreated Michael, running up and entering the water.

But scarcely had Stephen uttered this threat in his ill-humour, than it came into his mind to carry it out seriously. He went on pulling up the rope, Michael, in terror, came further into the water, and struck out for the canoe.

He had almost reached it, when a well-known sound in the water made him turn his head; an enormous crocodile was swimming towards him with open jaws. Michael screamed and threw up his hands.

His cry was echoed by Stephen, whose first impulse was to catch up a javelin that lay at his feet, and hasten to his comrade's assistance. Then it

flashed across his mind that the diamond was in his possession, and that if Michael!—For a moment greed, hate, fear held him undecided, and that was enough for Michael's destruction. There was another fearful scream; Stephen shut his eyes; and when he opened them, the man and the monster had disappeared beneath the water. Faint and giddy, the survivor sat down in the boat, and let the current sweep him onwards.

* * * * *

Some days afterwards, a boat was found floating in the current of the river near St Louis, and at the bottom of it lay a man exhausted by hunger and sickness, who was conveyed in a dying state to the fort. There he was attended by the surgeon of one of the French ships, who at once recognised him.

"Stephen Riou! What has become of the other man who deserted with you?"

"Dead!" shrieked Stephen, and fell back on his pillow in a sort of swoon.

When he came to himself, he seized the doctor's hand, and said, eagerly—

"Surely I am not going to die—I can't be going to die. You will cure me?—promise!"

"I can only promise to do my best," said the surgeon, gravely.

"To die!" cried Stephen, wildly. "No—no! I wish to live—I must live. Listen to me! I have not told you. I am rich—rich as a prince. If you will only save me, I will give you—I will give you whatever you like. But don't let me die—don't let me die!"

The surgeon thought that he was delirious, and tried to calm him.

"Ah! you don't believe me, doctor. But I will show you—I can trust you. Listen! Do you see how I keep my hand pressed on my breast? I have a diamond here—a diamond worth a duchy."

"Indeed!"

"Look!" and with trembling hands the sailor drew out a little leather box.

The surgeon opened it, examined Stephen's treasure, and shook his head.

"Don't deceive yourself, my poor fellow," he said. "This is not a diamond."

"What?"

"This is not a diamond. It is only a piece of crystal."

Riou raised himself, and stared wildly into the surgeon's face, crying—

"Crystal? That's a lie! . . . Is it true? . . . Crystal! . . . I thought it was a treasure. It is worth nothing—nothing! And the marabout!—Michael! Wretch that I am!"

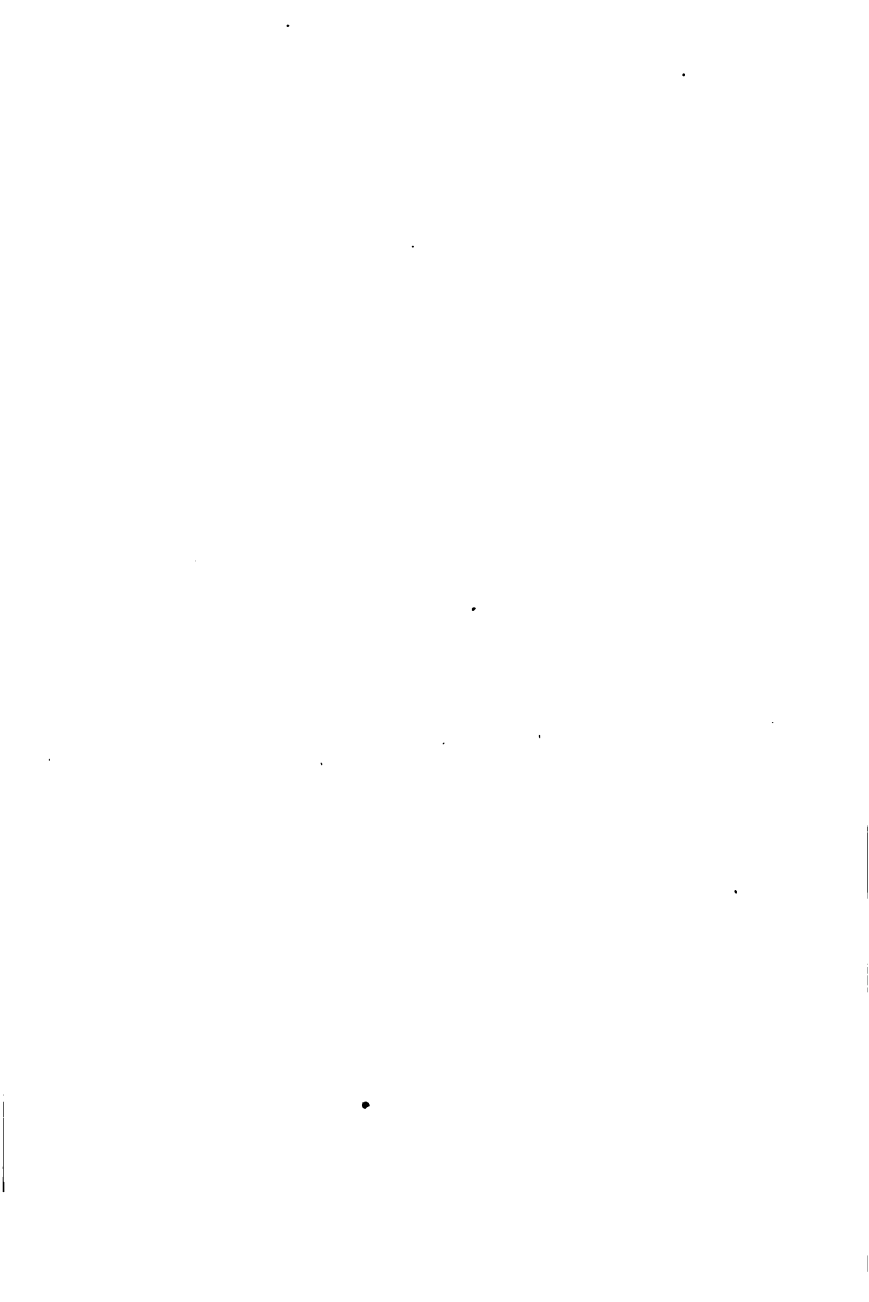
And he fell back, seized with a convulsion which the surgeon's experienced eye understood too well.

All day he continued delirious, but towards evening became calmer, and could be heard accusing himself of murder, and asking pardon of Heaven. He grew weaker and weaker without entirely recovering consciousness, and at length gave his last sigh, murmuring the words—

"Diamond—Michael—crystal!"

"Ah!" said the old surgeon, as he closed the eyes of the dead man, "I was right when I one day told him that courage without conscience is like a sword without a scabbard—equally dangerous to others and to ourselves."

THE DERVISH.





THE DERVISH.

WHEN on his travels, Zadig one day met a dervish whose white and venerable beard descended to his waist. He held in his hand a book which he was reading attentively. Zadig stopped and made him a profound bow. The dervish returned his salutation with such an air of dignity and courtesy, that Zadig had the curiosity to enter into conversation with him. He asked what book he was reading.

"It is the book of destiny," said the dervish. "Should you like to see it?"

He placed the book in the hands of Zadig, who, though instructed in several modern languages, could

not make out a single letter of this one. This redoubled his curiosity.

"You appear to me somewhat melancholy," said the good old man, addressing him.

"Alas! I have reason to be," said Zadig.

"If you allow me to accompany you, perhaps I may be of use to you, for I have often been able to fill the minds of the unfortunate with thoughts of comfort."

Zadig conceived a great respect for the manner and carriage of the dervish; and also for his beard and his book. He found in his conversation marks of superior intelligence. The dervish spoke of fate, of justice, of morality, of the highest good, of human weakness, of virtues and vices, with an eloquence so rich and attractive, that Zadig felt drawn towards him by an invincible charm. He earnestly begged the old man not to leave him till they should have returned to Babylon.

"That is what I was going to ask of you myself," said the dervish. "Swear to me by Oromasdes that you will not separate yourself from me for several days, happen what may."

Zadig made the solemn promise requested of him, and they set out together.

In the evening the two travellers arrived at a splendid castle. The dervish requested hospitality for himself and for the young man who accompanied him. The porter, who was so grand that he might have been taken for a nobleman, admitted them with a kind of disdainful condescension. They were presented to the butler, who allowed them to see the magnificent apartments of his master. At supper, they were seated at the lower end of the common table, without the lord of the castle honouring them with so much as a look ; but they were served, like the other guests, with delicacy and profusion. After supper, water to wash their hands was presented to them in a gold basin, adorned with emeralds and rubies, and they were conducted to a handsome sleeping apartment. Next morning a servant brought each of them a piece of gold, and then they were dismissed.

“The master of this house,” said Zadig, as they went, “seems to me a generous man, though rather proud. He nobly dispenses his hospitality.”

As he said these words, he observed that the side of his companion's mantle appeared to be swollen out by some large object ; and he saw there the basin of gold set with jewels, which the dervish had stolen. He did not venture to take any notice of this, but he was very much surprised at it.

Towards noon, the dervish presented himself at the door of a small house, where lived a rich miser. He requested shelter for a few hours. A gruff old servant, shabbily dressed, received them rudely enough, and let them into the stable, where he set before them some wizened olives, some stale bread, and some sour wine. The dervish ate and drank with as much apparent satisfaction as on the preceding evening ; then addressing himself to the old servant, who was watching them closely, to see that they stole nothing, and had already begun to urge them to depart, he gave him the two pieces of gold that they had received in the morning, and thanked him for all his attention.

"I pray you," he added, "let me speak to your master."

The servant, in some astonishment, introduced the two travellers to the miser.

"Magnificent lord," said the dervish, I feel that I must return you most humble thanks for the manner in which you have entertained us. Deign, I pray you, to accept this golden vessel as a feeble mark of my gratitude."

The miser was thunderstruck by this generosity; and the dervish did not give him time to recover from his astonishment, but set out at once with his young companion.

"My father," said Zadig, "what is this I see? You appear to me to be strangely different from other men. You steal a basin of gold adorned with jewels from a nobleman who entertains you magnificently, and give it to a miserly fellow who treats you shabbily."

"My son," replied the old man, "this magnificent nobleman, who only entertains strangers for the sake of vanity and to make people wonder at his wealth, will become more sensible, while the miser will learn to exercise hospitality. Be astonished at nothing, and follow me."

His companion could not make out whether it was the wisest or the maddest of men with whom he found himself thrown in contact ; but the dervish spoke with such an air of authority, that Zadig, bound, moreover, by his oath, felt himself obliged to follow him.

They arrived that evening at a house, plainly built, but in an exceedingly pleasant situation. Here there was no sign either of prodigality or of stinginess. The master of the house was a philosopher, who lived here retired from the affairs of the world and the company of his fellow-men, and devoted himself to wisdom and virtue, in the pursuit of which he cheered his solitude, and never felt dull. Nor was his solitude uninterrupted. One of his objects in having this retreat built was to be able to receive strangers with an open-handed hospitality that had nothing of ostentation in it.

He himself now received the two travellers, and first conducted them to a commodious apartment, where they were invited to repose, while a suitable repast was being prepared for them.

When they sat down to table, these three, finding themselves congenial company, held a long and earnest discussion upon questions of religion and philosophy. All of them agreed that in this world things do not go according to the will of the wisest ; but the dervish bade them forbear to judge the ways of God, pointing out that good and evil, pleasure and pain, are all necessary to the progress of human life, and that therefore men ought not to repine under the trials sent by Providence, but to confess their ignorance, and to trust that the Almighty Wisdom will do right.

Zadig wondered how a man who had done such mad things could talk so well. At length, after a conversation as instructive as agreeable, the master of the house reconducted his two guests to their apartment, expressing his gratitude and delight that men so wise and good had been sent to his abode. He offered them money in a generous and polite way, which could not give offence. The dervish refused ; and said he would take leave of him then, as he intended to set out for Babylon very early next

morning. The parting was quite affectionate ; Zadig especially felt his heart full of liking and regard for such an amiable man ; and when they found themselves alone in their room, they spent a long time in praising their host.

At the break of day the old man awoke his companion.

“We must set out,” he said. “But, while everybody is still asleep, I wish to leave our friend a proof of my esteem and affection.”

With that he took a torch and set fire to the house. Zadig, in alarm and astonishment, began to cry out, and wished to prevent him from committing such a frightful crime. The dervish held him back by superior force ; the house burst into flames.

By this time they were already far enough away, and the hermit tranquilly looked at the work of destruction which he had just caused.

“Heaven be praised !” he said ; “there is the house of my dear host destroyed from top to bottom. Happy man !”

On hearing these words, Zadig was not sure whether

to burst out laughing, or to abuse his reverend companion, or to beat him, or to run away from him. But in the end he did none of these things, and, still subdued by the inexplicable influence exercised by the dervish, followed him in spite of himself to their last resting-place.

This was at the house of a virtuous and charitable widow, who had a nephew about fourteen years old, a lad of very agreeable manners, and her sole hope and comfort. She did the honours of her humble house as well as she could, and next day she ordered her nephew to accompany the travellers to a bridge that had lately been broken down, and therefore was a dangerous means of passage for those unacquainted with the neighbourhood.

The young man, proud of the task committed to him, strode on in front. When they had reached the bridge, the dervish said—

“Come, young man, I must show my gratitude to your aunt.”

With this he takes him by the hair, and throws him into the river. The boy sinks, reappears for a

moment on the surface, and then is swallowed up by the deep and rapid stream.

"Oh, monster! oh, most wicked of all men!" exclaimed Zadig.

"You promised to be more patient," said the dervish, interrupting him. "Learn that under the ruins of this house which was set on fire the master has found an immense treasure; learn that this young man who has just perished would have murdered his mother in one year, and yourself in two."

"Who told you so, wretch?" cried Zadig. "And, even though you have read these events in your book of destiny, have you a right to drown a child who has done you no harm?"

As Zadig was speaking, he perceived that the old man's beard had disappeared, and that his wrinkled countenance became fresh and shining. His dervish's robe fell off; four splendid wings were seen to cover his limbs, of majestic proportions and glowing with light.

"Oh, messenger of Heaven! oh, celestial spirit!" cried Zadig, prostrating himself. "Hast thou indeed

descended from the empyrean to teach a feeble and foolish mortal submission to the eternal laws of destiny?"

"Men," said the angel Jesrad,—for it was he,—
"men judge of everything, though they know nothing. Of all men, you are the one who best deserves to be enlightened."

Zadig requested permission to speak.

"I do distrust my own judgment, but may I pray thee to clear up a single doubt? Would it not have been better to have corrected this boy, and to have made him virtuous, than to have drowned him?"

"If he had been virtuous," replied Jesrad, "and if he had lived, his destiny would have been to be assassinated himself, along with his wife and child."

"Alas!" cried Zadig, "is it then necessary that there shall be crimes and misfortunes, and that these misfortunes fall even upon the good?"

"The wicked," replied Jesrad, "are always unhappy. They serve to put to the trial a small number of just persons scattered here and there over the earth; and there is no evil from which some good does not spring."

"But," said Zadig, "if there were nothing but good, and no evil existed on the earth?"

"Then this earth would be another earth. Nothing is perfect but the Supreme Being. He has created millions of worlds, of which not one resembles another. There are not two blades of grass on this earth, or two globes in the boundless fields of heaven, which are altogether alike. All creation has been ordered so by His power and for His glory. All that you see on this little atom where you have been born is arranged to happen in its fixed place and time. Men suppose that this boy who has just perished fell into the water by chance, and that by the same power of chance that house was burned; but there is no chance; all is sent as trial, or punishment, or warning, or reward. Weak mortal! cease to dispute against the Power that should be adored."

"But"—said Zadig.

As he said *but*, the angel was already winging his flight towards the tenth sphere of heaven. Zadig fell on his knees and worshipped the Ruler of the world.

GIL BLAS IN THE ROBBERS'
CAVE.





GIL BLAS IN THE ROBBERS' CAVE.

MORE frightened than any of my companions by the danger that seemed to threaten us, I made haste to leave Cacabelos, and reaching the open country, leaped over every ditch I came to, and at length found myself near a forest. I was about to plunge into it, with the intention of hiding myself in one of the densest thickets, when two men on horseback appeared before me. They approached me, and, each holding a pistol to my head, ordered me to tell them who I was, where I came from, what I was going to do in the forest, and to be sure not to deceive them. This kind of

questioning required an answer ; so I replied that I was a young man called Gil Blas, from Oviedo, and that I was on my way to the University of Salamanca. I told them, also, the scrape I had just got into, and confessed that the fear of being put to the torture had made me take to flight. They burst out laughing at my simplicity, and one of them said—

“Don’t be afraid, my friend. Come with us, and we will put you in safety.”

With that he made me mount behind him on his horse, and we soon buried ourselves in the forest.

I did not know what to think of this unexpected meeting, but I did not suppose it would end in anything unfortunate. If these people, I said to myself, were bad characters, they would have robbed me, and perhaps murdered me. They must be honest gentlemen of this country, who, seeing what a fright I am in, have pitied me, and are taking me home with them out of charity. I was not long left in uncertainty. After taking several winding turns through the forest, we found ourselves at the bottom of a hill, where we all dismounted.

"This is where we live," said one of the cavaliers; but it was in vain that I looked round in all directions, for I could see neither house nor hut, nor the slightest sign of human habitation.

Then the two men lifted a great wooden trap-door, covered with earth and brushwood, which concealed the opening of a long sloping passage under ground, into which the horses turned so readily, that they were evidently accustomed to it. The cavaliers made me enter along with them; then, replacing the door with cords which were attached to it for that purpose, had my worthy self caught like a rat in a trap.

I knew now with what sort of people I was, and you may judge if I felt less alarmed than when I feared to fall into the hands of the magistrates of Cacabelos. A far greater and more reasonable fear almost deprived me of my senses; I thought that I was going to lose both my money and my life. So looking round me, like a victim led to the altar, I walked, already more dead than alive, between my two conductors, who very uselessly kept exhorting me not to be afraid. When we had gone about two

hundred paces we entered a stable. Two iron lamps hanging from the roof gave a dim light and let me see plenty of straw and several barrels filled with corn. Twenty horses could easily have been accommodated there, but there were only the two which had just come in, and which an old but powerful negro was busy in fastening to their racks.

We left the stable, and, by the wretched glimmer of some other lamps, which seemed only to give enough light to show the horror of the place, we came to a kitchen where the cook, an old woman of sixty years and more, was roasting some meat at a bright fire, and making supper ready.

"See, Dame Léonarde," said one of the cavaliers, presenting me to this fair spirit of the shades, "here is a lad whom we have brought you. My good fellow," he continued, turning to me, and observing how pale and wretched I looked, "don't be afraid; nobody is going to do you any harm. We required an assistant for our cook; we met you, and lucky it was for you that we did. You shall fill the place of a servant of ours who went and died about a fortnight

ago. He was a young man of a very delicate constitution. You seem to me more robust ; you will not die. It is true that you shall never see the sun again, but, to make up for that, you shall live well and warmly down here. We keep good fires and plenty to eat and drink."

With that he took a torch, and ordering me to follow him, led me into a cellar, where I saw a great number of bottles and jars well sealed, which were full, he said, of excellent wine. Then he made me go through several chambers cut out of the rock. In some were pieces of linen ; in others wool and silk stuffs. I perceived in another quantities of gold and silver, and of plate marked with different coats of arms. My guide, or rather jailor, asked me more questions. He wanted to know why I had left my native place, and when he had satisfied his curiosity, he said—

"Well, then, Gil Blas, since you came from home only to seek a good situation, you may consider yourself lucky in having fallen into our hands. I told you already that you shall live on the best of everything ;

and here you may roll on gold and silver if you like. Besides, you may be sure that you are safe. This cave is so well hidden, that the officers of the Holy Brotherhood might come a hundred times into the forest without discovering it. The entrance is only known to myself and my comrades, and I have lived here for fifteen years with impunity. My name is Rolando; I am captain of the band, and that was one of my men that you saw with me."

As the Captain Rolando finished speaking, there appeared in the room six new faces. It was the lieutenant and five men of the band, who had just returned loaded with booty. The lieutenant addressed the captain, and gave him a report of their expedition; then there was nothing to do but to give themselves up to enjoyment. A long table was set out in the chief room, and I was packed off to the kitchen, where the old woman, called Léonarde, instructed me in what I had to do. I yielded to necessity, since my bad fortune had so ordered it, and, swallowing down my vexation, prepared to act as servant to these highly respectable people.

First I covered the sideboard with wine bottles and silver cups, and, this done, I brought up the supper, which was no sooner on the table than the robbers fell on it and began to eat with very good appetite, while I stood behind them, and kept myself ready to pour out wine for them whenever they desired it. I performed this duty so well that they all praised me, saying that I seemed to have been born for my post, and that I was a hundred times more handy than my predecessor and than Signora Léonarde, who had had the honour of waiting on them since his death.

The robbers all ate a great deal, and drank in proportion, so they were soon in good-humour, and made plenty of noise, singing, shouting, jesting, telling tales, or all speaking at once so loud that nobody could hear a word. At length they grew tired and went to bed; and when I had assisted the captain to undress, and cleared away the table in the robbers' dining-room, I repaired to the kitchen, where Domingo (that was the old negro's name) and Léonarde were at supper. Though I had no appetite, I accepted their invitation to sit down beside them. But I could not

eat a morsel, and I suppose my face was glum enough, for these two comical creatures saw my dejection, and did their best to console me.

"Why are you so troubled, boy?" said the old woman. "You ought rather to be glad to see yourself in such good quarters. You are young, and you seem simple; you would soon find yourself lost in the world; while here your innocence is safely protected from all the troubles of life."

"Dame Léonarde is right," gravely remarked the negro in his turn. "There is nothing in the world but trouble. Thank Heaven that you are safely out of it."

I did not attempt to answer these arguments, for that could have done me no good. At length Domingo, after eating and drinking a great deal, retired to his stable, and Léonarde took a lamp and led me to a recess of the cave, which had been used as a burying-place for such of the robbers as had died in it, and where I saw a single piece of furniture, that looked a great deal more like a tombstone than a bed.

"This is your room," she said to me. "The lad whose

place you have the good luck to occupy, slept here while he lived among us, and he still reposes here now that he is dead. He allowed himself to die in the flower of life ; don't you be so silly as to follow his example."

Along with this piece of good advice she gave me the light, and returned into the kitchen. I put the lamp on the ground, and threw myself on the couch, less to take rest than to be able to deliver myself up to my miserable thoughts.

"Is not my destiny a horrible one!" I exclaimed. "I must give up for ever the sight of the sun, and, as if it were not enough to be buried alive at the age of eighteen, I am reduced to be a servant of thieves, to pass the day with wicked men, and the night with dead ones."

Such reflections made me weep bitterly, but I soon saw that there could be no good in spending the time in vain complaints, and set myself to think more practically.

"Why," I said to myself, "it surely cannot be impossible to escape ! The robbers are fast asleep ; the

old cook and the negro will be so also before long ; and while they are all snoring, can't I take the lamp and find the passage by which I entered this dreadful place ? Perhaps I shall not be strong enough to lift the trap-door at the entrance. At all events, I can try ; despair, perhaps, will give me strength, and aid me to succeed."

As soon as I judged that Léonarde and Domingo would be sound asleep, I got up, and, commending myself to all the saints, crept out of the recess in which I had been put. By the light of the lamp, I managed, with some difficulty, to make my way through the windings of the cave, and got as far as the opening to the stable, where I saw the passage which I was seeking. I sprang forward, eagerly making for the trap-door ; but alas ! in the middle of this passage I came upon an iron grating, so strong that I could not move it, and so close that my hand would scarcely pass between the bars. I had not noticed this on my arrival at the cave, and now I found it a most serious and unexpected obstacle to my further progress.

I vainly was trying if I could shake the bars, when

suddenly I felt five or six cuts of a stout whip on my shoulders, and could not restrain a cry of pain and surprise, which rang through the whole cave. Turning round, I saw the old negro in his shirt, holding in one hand a dark lantern, and in the other the cow-hide whip of which I had just made the acquaintance.

“Ah! ah!” he chuckled; “little fool! do you wish to escape? Oh! don’t think that you can cheat me; I was looking after you. You thought the grating was open, did you? You may be sure that you will always find it firmly shut. When we keep any one here against his will, he must be sharper than you are if he wishes to escape from our clutches.”

My cries had awoken two or three of the robbers, who, not knowing but that the officers of justice were upon them, gave the alarm to their companions, and in an instant the whole band was on foot. Half naked, and with their swords and carabines in their hands, they came running up to the place where I was so unpleasantly engaged with Domingo. But, as soon as they learned the cause of the disturbance, their

alarm was changed into loud merriment at my expense.

"What is this, Gil Blas?" cried one of them, while the rest stood by and roared with laughter. "Do you want to run away before you have been six hours with us? Go to bed. This time you shall get off with no further punishment than the thrashing Domingo has given you, but if you should ever try to escape again, we will skin you alive."

They went back to bed; the old negro returned to his stable, and I to my cemetery, where I spent the rest of the night in sighing and crying.

For the next few days my wretchedness seemed insupportable, and I thought I should have died of despair. But custom made my new life more bearable than I could have believed possible; hope came to my aid, and luckily I perceived that, if I wished ever to escape, my best plan would be to conceal from the robbers my real state of mind. So I pretended to seem less sad. I began to laugh and sing, though indeed my heart was heavy enough. In fact, I dissimulated so well, that Léonarde and Domingo were

completely deceived ; they thought that the bird was getting to like the cage, and my masters were of the same opinion. When I waited on them, I assumed an air of liveliness, and never lost a chance of putting in some little joke into their conversation,—a freedom with which they were by no means displeased, but rather amused.

“Gil Blas,” said the captain to me one evening when I was making myself very agreeable, “you have done quite right, my good fellow, to shake off your melancholy, and I am delighted with your manners. One never judges rightly of people by first appearances ; I had no idea you were so merry and witty.”

The others also joined in the chorus, and praised me to the skies. They seemed so pleased with me, that I thought it well to take advantage of this good disposition, and said to them—

“Gentlemen, allow me to open my mind freely to you. Since I have been living here, I feel myself quite a changed person. You have rid me of the prejudices of my education, and made me like one of yourselves. I have a taste for your profession, and I begin to feel

quite anxious to have the honour of making one of your band, and sharing the perils of your expeditions."

This speech gave great satisfaction to the whole band, and they thought much better of me for my meritorious resolution. But they agreed that I must serve for six months more, as a trial of my fidelity and steadiness, after which I might be allowed to accompany them occasionally on their excursions, and finally should be admitted to the honourable position which I sought as a full-fledged member of the company.

It was necessary, then, to continue to hide my real feelings and to stick to my work as waiter. I was very much disgusted at this delay ; for, of course, I only wished to become a robber in order to get a chance of leaving the cave like the rest ; and I hoped that some day I should be able to escape from their society. This hope alone sustained my life. I certainly did try now and then to see if I could not catch Domingo napping ; but it was in vain—he was always on guard. A hundred Orpheuses could not have charmed this Cerberus. So I put off my intention of

escape till the time of probation prescribed for me by the robbers had elapsed, and for this I waited with as much impatience as if I had been promised admittance into a company of merchant princes.

Thank Heaven, in six months this time came, and one day Signor Rolando said to his followers—

“Gentlemen, we must keep the promise which we made to Gil Blas. I have rather a good opinion of this lad; we shall make something out of him, if I am not mistaken. I propose that to-morrow we take him with us to gather laurels on the highroads.”

The robbers all agreed to their captain's proposition, and, to show me that they now regarded me as one of their band, from that moment I was set free from the task of waiting on them, and old Léonarde was restored to the situation of which I had deprived her. Besides, they made me put off my own clothes, and dressed me out anew from the spoils of a young nobleman whom they had just robbed. Then I prepared to serve my first campaign in the ranks of robbery.

It was towards the end of a fine night in September

that I first issued from the cave, armed, like the rest, with a sword, a gun, and two pistols, and mounted on an excellent horse, stolen from the same person whose clothes I wore. My joy to breathe the fresh air again was great beyond imagination ; but I had lived so long among these subterranean shadows, that even the faint glimmer of dawn almost dazzled my eyes ; little by little, however, they grew accustomed to the light.

We proceeded to post ourselves in ambuscade in a thicket near the highroad to Leon. There we were waiting for whatever luck fortune might please to send us, when we saw approaching a monk of the order of St Dominic, mounted upon a sorry mule.

“Come now,” said the captain, laughing, “here is a job for Gil Blas to try his hand at. Let him go and pull the feathers off this monk, and we will stay here and see how he manages it.”

The other robbers agreed that this was just a duty which would suit me, and urged me to acquit myself of it creditably.

“Gentlemen,” said I, “you shall not be disap-

pointed. I will go and strip the good man as naked as my hand, and bring you back his mule."

"No, no," said Rolando; "it is not worth the trouble. Bring us his reverence's purse only; that is all we want."

Thereupon I issued from the wood, and spurred towards the monk, praying Heaven to forgive me the crime I was about to commit. I should like to have taken that chance to escape, but most of the robbers were better mounted than me, and if they had seen me trying to run away, they would have been at my heels in a moment, or perhaps would have shot me with their carabines, a fate for which I had no fancy. I did not dare to run such a risk, but made up to the monk, and, presenting a pistol at him, demanded his purse. He pulled up at once, looked at me all over, and, without seeming afraid, replied—

"My poor boy, you are very young to take to such a bad trade."

"Well," said I, "bad as it is, I wish I had begun it sooner."

"Ah! my son," said the monk, not understanding

the true meaning of my words, "what do you say? What blindness! Allow me to show you the unhappy state."——

"Oh! father, a truce to your preaching, please," I interrupted. "I didn't take to the roads to hear sermons; I want money."

"Money!" he said, with an air of astonishment. "You must have a very poor opinion of the charity of Spaniards if you think that persons of my character have any need of money to travel in Spain. Undeceive yourself. Wherever we go, we are received with kindness; we are lodged and fed, and no one asks us for any other recompense than our prayers. Indeed, we never carry money with us; we abandon ourselves to the care of Providence."

"No, no," I rejoined, "you don't abandon yourselves altogether to Providence. You have always a few good pistoles about you, to make sure. But come, father," I added; "let us have done with all this. My comrades, who are waiting in that wood, grow impatient; throw your purse on the earth, or I will certainly kill you."

At these words, which I pronounced with a threatening air, the monk seemed to be afraid.

"Look here," he said ; " I am going to satisfy you, since it is no use to resist. I see very well that talk is thrown away upon you fellows."

So saying, he drew out from beneath his robe a large purse of chamois leather, which he let fall to the ground, and I told him he might continue his journey, a permission which he did not give me the trouble to repeat. He spurred up his mule, and as he hastened away, I dismounted and picked up the purse, which seemed somewhat heavy. Then I got up again and regained the wood, where the robbers were impatiently waiting to congratulate me on my victory.

" Courage, Gil Blas!" said Rolando ; " you have just done wonders. I kept my eye upon you, and I predict that you will become an excellent highwayman."

The lieutenant and the others spoke in the same strain, and I thanked them all for the good opinion they had of me, and promised to do my best to deserve it.

" Now, let us see what the monk had in his purse,"

they said, proceeding to examine the booty which I had brought back. "It is sure to be well lined," continued one of them, "for these old fellows don't travel about in the style of pilgrims."

The captain then opened the purse, and took out from it two or three handfuls of copper medals, mixed with a few scapularies and other religious tokens. At the sight of such a novel prey, the robbers burst out into immoderate laughter, so careless and hardened were they about these sacred things. I was the only one who did not laugh, and indeed the laughing was all at my expense. Every one flung his jest at me, and the captain said, "My faith, Gil Blas, if you take a friend's advice, you won't try to play any more tricks on the monks, for they are too sharp for you."

We now remained in the wood the greater part of the day without seeing any traveller who might make up to us for the poverty of the monk. At length there came in sight a carriage drawn by four mules, and escorted by three men who seemed to be well armed. Rolando asked the opinion of his men, and

found that they were willing to attack ; so he drew us up as seemed best to him, and gave the order to bear down upon the carriage. In spite of the commendations which had been bestowed on me for the way I had acquitted myself of my previous exploit, I now felt myself seized with a violent trembling, and a cold perspiration covered my whole body. This was not encouraging ; but Rolando, remarking the fright I was in, looked at me askance, and said, sharply—

“Listen, Gil Blas ; you must do your duty ; for I warn you, if you flinch, I will put a bullet through you head.”

I was too sure that he would keep his word to neglect this warning ; so I commended myself to Heaven, and tried not to think of the danger.

In the meanwhile the carriage and its guardians were approaching. They soon saw what sort of people we were, and, guessing our intentions, pulled up at the distance of about a musket-shot, and got ready the carabines and pistols with which they were armed as well as we. As they were preparing to

receive us, a handsome and richly-dressed gentleman jumped out of the carriage, mounted a led horse, and put himself at the head of the others, armed only with a sword and two pistols, as he was. They were only four against nine, but they advanced towards us with a boldness that redoubled my fear. Though trembling in every limb, I did not fail to keep myself ready to fire when the rest did so ; but, if the truth is to be told, I shut my eyes when I let off my carabine, and I am pretty sure that shot need not weigh heavily on my conscience.

I will not describe the fight that now took place. I was present, but I saw nothing of it, my fright concealing from me the horror of the very spectacle that was frightening me. All I know is, that after a good deal of shooting and shouting, I heard my comrades cry "*Victory ! victory !*" and at this the terror with which my senses were possessed disappeared, and I saw four cavaliers lying dead on the field of battle. On our side we had only one man killed ; and the lieutenant had received a wound in the arm, but it was a very slight one, scarcely more than skin-deep.

Rolando now galloped up without delay to the door of the carriage. Inside was a lady of about twenty-five years of age, who seemed to be very beautiful, in spite of the sad condition she was in. She had fainted during the fight, and still remained insensible. Our captain stood looking at her, while the rest, with a keener eye to business, looked after the booty. We began by catching the horses of the slain men, which had run away to some little distance, after losing their riders. As for the mules, they were standing stock-still, though their driver had run away as soon as he saw the fight going against his party. We set to work unharnessing them and loading them with the luggage which was fastened before and behind the carriage. This done, by the captain's orders, one of the best-mounted of the robbers took before him the lady, still in a senseless condition ; then, leaving on the road the empty carriage and the dead bodies stripped of everything valuable, we carried away with us the mules, the horses, the lady, and her luggage.

It had been dark for more than an hour when we arrived at our cave. The first thing was to take the

beasts to the stable, where we were obliged to tie them to the stalls, and look after them ourselves, as the old negro had been laid up for three days, crippled in every limb by rheumatism. He could use nothing but his tongue, which he employed in showing his ill-humour and impatience by horrible blasphemies. We allowed the wretch to curse and swear without attending to him, and repaired to the kitchen, where we exhausted all possible care on the lady, our prisoner, and succeeded at length in bringing her out of her swoon. But when she had recovered her senses, and saw herself surrounded by the faces of strange men, she understood the misfortune that had happened to her, and trembled violently. She raised her eyes to Heaven, and in them could be seen painted the greatest horror and despair. Then, yielding again to horror, she sunk back, her eyes closed, and the robbers thought that death was about to deprive them of their prey. The captain, judging it better to leave her to herself than to torment her with their help, had her laid on Léonarde's bed, and left her there to take her chance.

We passed into the chief room, and examined the packages which had come into our possession. Some were full of lace and linen, others of dresses; but the last, when opened, was found to contain nothing less than small bags of coin, which gave great delight to the gentlemen of the cave. Then the cook laid the table and brought up the supper, and we talked over the great victory we had gained.

"Confess, Gil Blas," said the captain, "that you were very much afraid."

I replied that it was true, but that I would fight like a champion when I had made two or three campaigns. The conversation then turned on the mules and horses, and it was settled that next morning, before daybreak, we should all go to sell them at Mansilla, where it was not likely that our exploit was known.

This resolution having been taken, we finished supping, and returned to the kitchen to see how the lady was getting on. We found her in the same situation. Rolando enjoined old Léonarde to look after her, and each of us retired to his own chamber.

As for me, as soon as I was in bed, instead of going to sleep, I did nothing but think of our unhappy captive. I made no doubt that she was a lady of rank ; and pitying her from the bottom of my heart, I began to think if there were no means of rescuing her from her unpleasant situation, and at the same time delivering myself from this kind of life. I reflected that Domingo could not move an inch, and that during his illness the old cook had the key of the grating. This thought stirred up my imagination, and caused me to conceive a project which I turned carefully over in my mind, and presently began to execute in the following manner.

I pretended to be very unwell. After uttering a few sighs and groans by way of prelude, I began to send out loud cries. The robbers awoke, and soon they were all with me, wanting to know why I was making such a noise. I told them that I was in great pain, and, to persuade them, I set to work grinding my teeth, twisting up my face, making violent contortions with my limbs, and altogether behaving in a strange fashion. In fact, I played my

part so well, that the robbers, sharp as they were, let themselves be deceived, and believing that I really was in great pain, did all they could to relieve me.

At the break of day they prepared to set out for Mansilla. I was getting up, to make them think that I desired to accompany them, but they prevented me.

"No, no, Gil Blas," said Rolando; "remain here, my boy. Perhaps your illness will come back. You shall accompany us another time, but to-day you are not in a state to go away from home."

I thought I had better not press the matter too much, for fear they should take me at my word; but I tried to look mortified at not being able to go with them, and did it so well, that they left the cave without the least suspicion of my project. As soon as they had gone, I said to myself—

"Now, Gil Blas, you must be firm, and call up all your resolution. Domingo is not in a state to oppose your enterprise, and Léonarde cannot prevent you from executing it; you will never have a more favourable opportunity."

Gathering confidence from these reflections, I got up, took my sword and pistols, and went to the kitchen. But before entering it, I heard Léonarde speaking to the unfortunate lady, and stopped to hear what she said.

“Weep, my child, cry away ; it will do you good. You will soon get over your grief, and grow accustomed to live with these gentlemen, who are very nice people. You shall be treated like a princess, and they will be very polite to you. There are many women who would give a good deal to be in your place.”

I did not give the old hag time to say more. I walked into the kitchen, and, holding a pistol to her head, I bade her give up the key of the grating. The tone in which I spoke showed her that I was in earnest, and, old as she was, she loved life too well to dare to refuse me what I asked. When I had the key in my hands, I turned to the unfortunate lady and said—

“Madame, Heaven has sent you a deliverer. Get up and follow me, and I will escort you wherever you wish.”

The lady listened eagerly, and threw herself at my feet, imploring me to do her no harm, as if she could scarcely believe that I was indeed her friend. I raised her, and assured her that she might trust me implicitly. Then I took some ropes which were lying in the kitchen, and, with the lady's aid, tied Léonarde to the legs of a large table, giving her to understand at the same time, that I would kill her if she uttered the least cry.

After that I lit a candle, and went into the chamber which served as the treasury of the band. I filled my pockets with as many pistoles as they could hold, and persuaded the lady to do so also, representing to her that she was only taking back her own property. We proceeded next to the stable, into which I entered alone, with my pistol in readiness to cure the old negro of his pains for ever, if he tried to interfere with us. But luckily he was so ill that I took my horse out without his seeming even to perceive it. The lady was waiting for me at the door; we entered the passage leading to the mouth of the cave, unlocked the grating, and arrived at the trap-door. We had to use

all our strength to raise it, or perhaps it was only the vigour lent us by our anxiety that enabled us to succeed ; but we did succeed, and, just as the day was breaking, found ourselves outside of this horrible place.

All we now thought of was to get away from it as soon and as far as possible. I leaped on my horse, and took the lady behind me, and we soon reached the edge of the forest. I knew nothing about the country, and was in a sad state of alarm lest the road we were taking should turn out to be the one to Mansilla, and we should meet Rolando and his men on their return. Happily my fears were unfounded. About two hours after mid-day we arrived at the town of Astorga, and alighted at the first inn. Thus ended my career as a robber.



SUPERLATIVE.





SUPERLATIVE.

A WORTHY couple had lived together for fifteen years without having any children. At the end of that time they had a son, and they prayed Heaven that, to make up for this delay, he might be gifted with some extraordinary advantage over other men. And their desire was granted, for the boy came into the world so handsome and so strong, and so much larger than other infants, that he received the name of Superlative.

This pretentious name might have turned out to be a badly-chosen one, for it happens often that babies who start well in point of size do not keep up their growth in proportion ; but it was not so with Superlative. He surpassed all the hopes of his parents, and grew so fast, that he was a long way bigger than any boy of his age.

At twelve years of age he had the height of a man, and used to measure himself with pride against the tallest soldiers whom he met, looking down contemptuously upon his companions, and not hiding how little he thought of them. At fifteen he might have entered the King's guard of grenadiers. At twenty he was a real giant, and stood a head and shoulders above any other man in the kingdom.

His growth had been uniform in all respects; he was not a thin, lanky whipping-post, like some tall men, but his body was stout and well-proportioned. His features were handsome and pleasing, though it was not the envious only who said that the expression of his face was rather spoiled by conceit.

Whether he looked proud or not, there could be no doubt that he felt so. As Superlative had only to show himself in any place to have all eyes turned towards him, he naturally came to believe himself a rare prodigy, and received with great complacency the compliments which common people used to pay him on his splendid stature.

His mother, to whom he showed too little respect, and whom he often treated as if she were a mere girl, would say, as she walked beside him holding his hand, for she was not tall enough to lean on his arm—

“My son, you ought to fear the anger of Heaven, if you do not enjoy with modesty the favour it has bestowed on you. No doubt you are the greatest of men, but God is greater.”

Such remonstrances produced no effect on Superlative. He did not care to pay attention to observations coming from such an inferior region. Was it not rather his business to direct and find fault with puny creatures who had not been able, like him, to raise themselves above the common level ?

To set off his stature to the best advantage, he loved to surround himself with little people ; he would have preferred actual dwarfs if he could have found them. And, what is more wonderful, it was observed that little men liked to be his companions, as if they thought that his height made them look bigger instead of smaller. On the other hand, tall men were jealous of him. The King having wished him to enter his guard of grenadiers, all of them declared with one voice that they would leave his majesty's service if Superlative were admitted among them.

So he remained proud and solitary, like an immense oak which grows freely in a field, while the trees of the neighbouring wood, squeezed up against

each other, look with envy at the giant shooting up on high without a rival.

It must be told that Superlative dressed himself in a way which he thought best adapted to show his figure. He had adopted a fancy costume, half military and half civilian in its character. He wore great boots with high heels, and spurs half-a-foot long; over his shoulders hung a short cloak, which, without hiding his fine limbs, made him seem broader across the shoulders; his head-dress, a tall fur shako, was generally decorated with a cockade or feather, which obliged him to stoop his head under the loftiest gates.

One day, dressed in this fashion, he set out for a neighbouring town where a public festival was being held. He loved to show himself in the middle of a crowd, and to hear the expressions of surprise and admiration which his appearance never failed to excite. Wherever he went, he always found himself the great spectacle of the occasion, and if there had been any shows in these days, he might have made his fortune.

But this time, as he came out of a wood, he found his path crossed by a broad and deep brook. For him this was a mere trifle, and he was about to jump

over it, when he saw beside him a little old woman, who said to him, humbly—

“If you please, sir, will you help me to cross the water?”

“And what are you going to do on the other side, my pretty chicken? Are you going to dance at the festival?”

“I am not pretty,” replied she, “and I am much too old to be called a chicken.”

“Excuse me, my dear,” replied Superlative, in a railing tone; “but, at the distance we are from each other, I cannot make out whether you are young or old, pretty or ugly. But just tell me, you unfortunate little thing, why you wish to cross the brook?”

“To go to the festival, like other people, and see the greatest fool, the most conceited creature in the world, for I know that he is going to be there.”

“And who is he, this conceited creature?”

“It is yourself, and nobody else, Superlative,” cried the old woman, her eyes sparkling with anger.

Superlative was about to catch her up roughly and throw her on the other side, but when he tried to seize her, he stood with his arms stretched out, and felt himself as unable to move as if he had been turned to stone.

"Since you have been rude as well as proud, Superlative, you shall be severely punished," said the fairy, 'for of course it was a fairy. "Listen to me! If you are half as clever as you are big, you will understand what I am going to say. *A sun eats up twelve whole moons, but now each moon shall eat up a sun.*"

After saying these words, the little old woman jumped over the brook as easily as if she had been a deer, and smiling ironically at Superlative, she pressed him, in a mocking tone, to come to the festival. He found himself now able to move, but he only used his liberty to return home, for he had a vague presentiment that some shameful disgrace was coming upon him.

As he went along, he thought over the mysterious words: *A sun eats up twelve moons, but now each moon shall eat up a sun.*

He could not at first understand the meaning of this threat; it was thirty days before he was able to make the least guess at the riddle, but when it did begin to explain itself, Superlative was seized with the greatest rage and grief.

A week after the adventure of the brook, he felt his clothes hanging rather loose, and it seemed to

him, some days afterwards, that his boots were too big for him. So he said to himself—

“The threats of this wretched old woman have annoyed me, and that has made me grow thin.”

He had given some hint of what had happened to his parents, but they did not think much about it. Now, however, they began to look at him with serious uneasiness.

“My dear Superlative,” said his little mother to him, “some unhappy secret must be consuming you. Are you in love? I hope it is so, and that Heaven will give you a wife worthy of you.”

“Oh! mother, don’t speak to me of love,” he replied, with a surly air; “and pray Heaven only that the moon may not eat up the sun.”

“You are always talking about the moon, my dear boy. Leave the moon and the sun where they are, and only think of enjoying yourself on this earth, where the sun and the moon and the stars see nothing half so handsome as yourself.”

On the thirtieth day of the month, Superlative, finding himself alone in his room, recognised beyond all doubt, that not only he had grown perceptibly thinner, but his stature was not so great. He had

already had some suspicion of this, but now it was more than suspicion.

"Father!" he called out, in an imperious tone, which he was only too fond of using to those about him.

"What do you wish, my son?" asked his father, running up at once along with his mother.

"Take the ruler and lay it on my head, while I stand up against the wall."

He placed himself in the corner where his proud parents had marked from year to year the progress of his height up to the age of twenty, when he had ceased to grow.

His father, standing on a chair, laid the ruler on his head, and said, after observing the marks on the wall—

"This is strange! The ruler is lower than the mark of your twentieth birthday, and yet people don't begin to shrivel up at your age."

"None of your rude remarks," said Superlative, roughly. "Tell me at once what height I am just now."

"My son, you are exactly the height you were at nineteen."

"Oh, dear!" cried Superlative. "A moon has eaten up a sun."

"What do you mean, my dearest child?" cried his mother, in alarm.

"I mean, that in a month I have lost the growth of a year, and that explains the old woman's words."

Superlative had then to explain his own words. He narrated the whole of the adventure with the fairy to his anxious parents, who guessed, like himself, that it presaged nothing good.

For some time the change in Superlative was not noticed by the public. It is true that he did not show himself so often, and this was remarked; but as yet nobody suspected his misfortune. At length, fearing that his decreasing size would be noticed by others as well as by himself, he sent for his bootmaker, and ordered him to raise the heels of his boots, at the same time most urgently requesting him not to mention it to anybody. This was stupid of him; for the bootmaker, struck by the air of mystery and importance with which Superlative gave this order, did not fail to repeat in twenty places both what he had been told to do, and how he had been asked to keep it a secret.

"He does not look so very large," said one of the dandies of the town some days afterwards.

"Indeed he does not," replied another. "It seems

to me that, in spite of these high heels, which are like little stilts, the giant is not so great as he was."

This observation was only too well founded. Superlative could almost measure his growing down, so to speak, from day to day.

"Father," he said, at length, "give me some money, please, and let me go away. Living in this town has become unbearable to me. I should like to travel, and I require a little change of air." -

"And a little better appetite," added his mother; "that will give you back your strength, and all that you have lost in the last few weeks. Go, my boy, and come back as tall and handsome as you were before this unhappy meeting with the fairy."

So Superlative set out on his travels; and when he came to a part of the country where he had been heard of, but never seen, he did not fail to arouse general admiration; and once more the prosperous days, when he had been followed by gaping crowds, seemed to return. The prettiest women turned round to look at him, and the handsomest men stopped when he passed, and stood talking about him with gestures of astonishment. But this triumph was spoiled for him by the thought that it was not to last long, for he could not hide from himself the hopeless

regularity with which he grew shorter. At the end of the second month another moon had eaten another sun. Superlative was only as high as he had been at eighteen. When he discovered this, he left the town he was staying in as quickly as possible and went to another one farther off, where he still excited a good deal of wonder. But he had the vexation of overhearing a gentleman whisper to a lady—

“After all one has heard about him, he is not so big as I expected.”

Yet he did everything he could to add to his height. He began, poor fellow, to walk on tiptoe; but still the moon went on and did its work, and at every town he passed through, he was obliged to send for a tailor to take in his jacket and shorten his trousers.

His parents had begged him to be sure and send them news of him from time to time, but he could scarcely make up his mind to take up the pen. Disheartened was he. Here, however, is one letter which he wrote to his mother, and which will give some idea of his affliction:—

“MY DEAR MOTHER,—Every day brings me more trouble, and proves to me more surely that the moon will not cease to persecute me till she has made me the most miserable creature in the universe. I am now

to the height I was at sixteen ! Another month of this, and I shall be no higher than an ordinary man, with the prospect of soon descending below the height of the smallest of men, and seeing myself as wretched a dwarf as I was before a splendid giant. Oh ! what will stop this dreadful *ungrowing* ? I hope it will never stop—that it will end in my shrivelling up to nothing ; for I am disgusted with life, and I wish I had never been born. How people will laugh at me when they know the truth ! I can never show myself among my own townsmen. I shall soon be obliged to hide myself even from strangers. Will you, my poor mother, be able to recognise me, since your unhappy son can now scarcely recognise himself ? I don't know when I shall be able to make up my mind to come home, for the smaller I grow, the harder I find it to do so. Please prepare our neighbours for what they will see. Tell them that a terrible and secret curse is consuming me. Alas ! the best I can hope for is their pity, and I was too proud in the days of my greatness to expect to obtain pity now that I am brought low. I send you a hundred kisses, dear mother, and remain your son, distressed, despairing, and diminishing in every respect, save that of love for you.—*SUPERLATIVE.*"

The poor mother sent her son the most consoling reply she could. She begged him to forget the past, and trust to the future; she carefully avoided reproaching him for his former pride, or wounding him with any of those "I told you so's," which are the sharpest sting of the unfortunate. And she did this not only out of sympathy, but because she saw that her son was really sorry for his past conduct. His foolish pride could no longer be so strong in his heart if he wished people to pity him. Her letter concluded by an earnest request that he would come home, since travelling did not seem to do him any good, and it might be as well to show himself before he had changed too much. She promised to do her best to prepare their friends and neighbours for what they would see.

While Superlative was trying to make up his mind, his father, who now did not think so much of him as he had once done, used his authority, and ordered him to come home, and, moreover, declared that he would not furnish him with a single penny unless he obeyed.

"If you are going to become as little as you were big before," he wrote, "I can't trust you to go about by yourself. In a short time, my protection will be necessary for you. Don't wait till strangers take you for a child, and make fun of you."

Oh ! what bitter words for the proud Superlative ! And the worse of them was, that he knew they were wise. He gave way ; he came back ; arrived at his home under the friendly shadow of night, and sighed as he passed beneath the high door which had once been made for his use. Alas ! an ordinary door would do for him now. He was only the height of an ordinary man.

At the sight of his mother he was deeply affected, and threw himself into her arms with a tenderness which made her shed tears. He had never behaved so before. But the poor woman could not help showing her surprise at the change that had taken place in him ; and his father did not try to conceal his disgust. He had so often allowed his paternal pride to be seen in the days when his son was the object of universal admiration, that he now felt himself deeply humiliated, and exposed to the public ridicule as much as Superlative.

“ This is what comes of your folly ! ” he grumbled.

“ Hush ! my husband,” said his wife. “ Are you going to receive our child with reproaches, when he stands in such need of pity ? And will you love him less because he is more equal with you ? Such as he is, many another father would be proud of him.”

“Let him stay at the height he is now, and I will have nothing to complain of,” said his father, still in an ill-tempered tone.

Superlative, without making any reply, asked leave to retire to his own room, and was again much affected to observe that his mother had taken care to put in it new furniture more suitable to his present size, and had made his bed shorter. “And soon, perhaps,” he said, as he lay down, “it will be again too long for me.”

The return of Superlative excited general curiosity. Every one wished to see him, but he remained at home, and kept himself hid from all eyes as much as he could. When at length he ventured out of doors, people all stared, and laughed, and wondered, and nothing was talked of over the whole town but the change that had come over Superlative. It was agreed that now this name did not suit him at all, and from henceforth the wits of the place dubbed him “Diminutive.”

Most people, remembering how conceited he had formerly been, were rather glad than otherwise of the misfortune that had happened to this ex-giant, now no taller than themselves—for such is the way of the world. But there was one person who sincerely pitied him, and that was the good and beautiful

Melila, who, if she had been vindictive, had more reason than any one else to rejoice at his humiliation. While Superlative was at the height of his glory, she had ventured to raise her eyes to him, but he had treated her love with disdain. She seemed such a little girl beside him ; and though Superlative confessed that she was beautiful, nothing would content him but a giantess.

"If she were only a foot or two taller!" he said then to his mother ; but now she appeared to him perfect, and he was deeply touched by her compassionate sympathy.

"If I were as sure," he said, "that my body would not change, as I am that my heart will always be hers, I would go and throw myself at her feet and beg her pardon for the coldness with which I have treated her."

As one day he was walking in a retired part of a wood, and thinking of Melila, whom should he meet but herself, for she was also walking there, and thinking of him.

"Charming Melila !" he said, "do you not laugh when you see me, as other people do?"

"I cannot laugh, sir, at anything which troubles you ; and to me you always appear such as I have always wished you to be."

Having thus opened a conversation, they continued

to walk side by side. It would be impossible to find a better-matched couple. Superlative was now only half a head taller than Melila.

"This is the first time," he whispered, "that I have felt glad to be what I now am, since, for the first time when by your side, I feel your hand within reach of mine."

Saying this, he gently took Melila's hand, and for some time they walked on in silence, till Superlative again spoke—

"Lean on my arm, and let me taste a pleasure which I have never been able to enjoy before."

Without a word Melila laid her arm in his, and again waited for him to speak. At length he broke out into a warm declaration of love, like an honourable man that he now was, not hiding from her the fate which he feared in the future, and finishing by saying, that if she deigned to accept his hand, they ought not to be married till they were assured that the fairy had ceased to persecute him.

"I have loved you long," replied Melila, gently, "and my love is not of that kind which cares to fear for the future. A woman who gives her heart, does not stop to calculate whether her husband may perhaps become lame or blind or disfigured by some

disease. Who knows? It may be that my devotion to you will appease the fairy, and then, dearest, you will be able to love me all the more for it."

After this, all that was necessary was to obtain the consent of the father and mother of Superlative, for Melila was an orphan, and depended on no one. And his parents were only too glad to give their consent ; so the marriage was settled.

The public, however, did not approve of it. Nearly every one thought Melila very foolish. To marry a man who was daily diminishing, almost to the sight of the eye, seemed a very hazardous step, and people cautioned her that in time she would have a mere atom of a husband. But Melila was full of love and confidence, and she was not ashamed to be seen walking about on the arm of her husband, who, indeed, was still rather a fine-looking man.

It was soon seen, however, that the charm of marriage did not triumph over the spell of the fairy. The honeymoon was as fatal to Superlative as the other months had been ; before it was over, he had undergone a noticeable diminution. It was now observed, indeed, that each new month made him shrink up more than the preceding one, for growth is, as you know, much more rapid in the early years of life.

Henceforward he would grow down at a frightful rate for he had now arrived at the period which answered to his childhood.

Children are generally merrier than grown-up people, but the smaller Superlative become, the more melancholy he grew. He saw Melila always well and blooming, and, as we judge people by ourselves, she seemed to him to become taller every day; and not only this, but to grow in kindness and tenderness. He could not bear to see any one except her and his mother, and completely shut himself up at home. Melila was sometimes able to cheer him a little.

"My little husband," she would murmur, "I love you very much just as you are, so, unless you are anxious to please somebody more than me, you need not trouble yourself."

But after a time Melila herself became sad, and could only look upon her husband with mournful compassion. His height had diminished so much that he would have been taken for a child, if it were not for his beard and the manly expression of his face. Alas! he was not yet at the end of his troubles. Before long, Superlative, the splendid Superlative, the once great Superlative, was nothing but a poor dwarf, a ridiculous little figure. He was rather more than two feet high.

"Mother," he said one day, in a voice which had become shrill like a child's, "you had better get ready my cradle. I shall soon fit it exactly."

"Patience, my son. Let us hope that things will not go so far as that."

"So far as that! I hope that they will go so far that nothing will be left of me but a little speck, in which my life will not be able to lodge. It is a miserable life, and it makes miserable the lives of two such faithful friends."

"Dear husband," said his wife, who, with a delicacy which all sensitive minds will appreciate, carefully avoided calling him by his name,—*"dear friend,"* allow us, I beg you, to devote ourselves to you: devotion is the happiness of woman. If you could but be happy, we should not be miserable."

These generous sentiments were a consoling balm for the wounds of poor Superlative. Alas! if he had known what was said out of doors, and how his sweet Melila was laughed at by foolish people, how great would have been his rage and grief! But he might have guessed that ill-natured tongues would have spared neither her nor him.

"She no longer dares to show her husband," said one.

"She keeps him carefully locked up for fear of his losing himself," said another.

"Yesterday," added a third, "she was very much frightened because he was nearly eaten by the cat. I believe she had great difficulty in rescuing him from its claws."

"Have you heard, neighbour, that they talk of putting him out to nurse?"

"How weary he must be, poor little man! Always shut up in the house!"

"That's a good idea, as if the house was not quite a big place for a tiny creature like him! Besides, don't you know that his wife takes him out regularly? People don't see him, for she puts him in her pocket, but as soon as they reach a safe place, where nobody secs them, she lets him out to play."

Melila heard some of this gossip, and guessed much more from the looks and manners of her neighbours; it of course vexed her very much, but she always preserved an air of sweetness and serenity.

At length the report spread that Superlative had become so very small that he would no longer show himself even to his wife and his mother. He lived, it was said, in a certain cupboard, where he had fitted up for himself an apartment proportioned to

his height. Melila used to come and sit near the cupboard, and let him look at her through little windows which he had made in the door of it; and though he was still getting smaller, his love and gratitude towards her grew greater every day.

“Think of me in the past, my dear little wife,” he would say to her sometimes. “Remember Superlative such as he was on the happy day of our marriage; forget what he is now. He has not long to live; his body will soon have wasted away, and his spirit will be set at liberty. Then I shall be able to see you without shame and without regret. I will fly round your head as you sleep; I will bring you the sweetest dreams; I will try to make up to you, dearest Melila, for all the trouble I have given you during my life. You will see about my funeral, will you not? Lay my poor little body on a pile of dried rose-leaves; burn it, and put the ashes in a small urn of black marble, which you can hold in your hand when you wish to think of me. Let it remain always in your care, and when you die, let some kind friend place it in your tomb. And let my epitaph be these lines :—

‘ Superlative here lies,
Who once in height and size

All men surpass'd ;
 And in misfortunes, too,
 Till he, who downward grew,
 Grew out at last.
 But among men, no other,
 In love of wife and mother,
 Has been so bless'd.
 They loved him weak, they loved him strong,
 They loved him little, they loved him long,
 They loved him least, they loved him best ;
 They wept his loss, yet joy that he has passed
 From earth, and is at rest.'"

While such sorrows were afflicting Superlative's family, public curiosity, which shows so little mercy to the unfortunate, was preparing for them fresh trouble. It was not only the children, servants, stall-keepers, and other vulgar people, who might be expected to be curious, that showed a malicious desire to see Superlative in his altered state, and to make fun of him, but it was the fashionable people, the great men of the city, and indeed the King himself was in this matter neither kinder nor wiser than the lowest of his subjects.

"Nothing can be easier for your majesty," said the courtiers, "than to get a sight of this little creature. You have only one word to say, and the father will produce him."

The philosophers spoke in the same way, and de-

clared that the public demanded that such a strange case should be carefully looked into.

We are easily persuaded when we wish to be so, say wise men. The King sent for Superlative's father, and ordered him to produce his son. But this man, whom trouble had made surly, gave back a rude refusal, and was at once arrested by the royal guards. A party of them also set out for the offender's house, but they found the doors and windows all closed by his wife and daughter-in-law, who had been warned of their approach.

"Are you going to break into the house of a citizen?" they cried through a loophole. "Surely you do not come from the King."

But they were obliged to believe it when they saw, his majesty come forward to superintend the execution of his orders in person. The house was surrounded, the door burst open, and when Melila refused to give up the key of the cupboard where Superlative was confined, sentries were placed round it to secure that he should not escape through the keyhole.

Then from inside this cupboard a shrill little voice, which excited the heartless laughter of the intruders, was heard begging his majesty to listen before giving orders to break the door.

“Sire, some time ago I was ambitious of the honour of guarding your sacred person, and you yourself were willing to grant me that favour ; but the jealousy of my fellow-citizens would not permit it. To-day I again feel the effects of their ill-will, and again they are urging you to commit a cruel and unjust action. I would consent to give your majesty a pleasure which, I must be allowed to say, is unworthy of your royal character, if it were not for the pain it would give my relations to see me thus exhibited as a ridiculous spectacle for the public. Sire, do not yield to this vain and unkind curiosity ; protect the wretch who supplicates you, and do not add to his misfortune by tormenting those who are dear to him.”

And at these words Melila threw herself at the knees of the King, who answered that, for his own part, he would be willing to leave Superlative alone, but that he could not refuse his faithful subjects the gratification which they all so much desired.

Then, without deigning to listen further, he ordered a locksmith to force open the cupboard, and stood by waiting to have the first sight of the poor dwarf. The lords of the court and the most respectable tradespeople pressed into the room ; the lower orders thronged the passages, and blocked up all the neigh-

bouring streets, hoping, in their turn, to be allowed to have a peep at the miserable object of public curiosity, and ready, each man of them, with his joke and laugh at the expense of Superlative. Every one was in the highest state of expectation.

The locksmith attacks the lock. It resists—he raises his hammer, and the door of the cupboard falls in pieces. Oh! wonder! Instead of a dwarf, there appears a fine man of good stature; in fact, Superlative—Superlative such as he had appeared in the wood before the eyes of his dear Melila. He throws himself into the arms of his wife, of his mother, of his father. He looks around him. Oh! wonder! wonder! The King, the locksmith, the nobles, the philosophers, the guards, the whole assembled multitude, have become pigmies on the spot. With cries of anger and despair they all swarm like ants round the feet of Superlative and his relations, who are struck with horror at this sudden transformation. They pity those who had been pitiless towards them.

“What can we do here?” said Superlative’s father. “Let us leave this country, where we are out of place, and go to live among men, and let the pigmies get on by themselves as best they can.”

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